74 C. 23. 16

THE TRIALL OF RELIGIONS; WITH CAUTIONS

To the Members of the

REFORMED CHURCH

AGAINST

Defection to the *ROMAN.*

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To the Right Reverend Father in God, WALTER Lord Biſhop of *Worceſter*, and Dean of his Majeſtie's Chappel, *&c.*

MY LORD,

'TIS well known to every man that hath the leaſt Acquaintance with our late and modern Hiſtorians or Divines, that the Adverſaries *of our* Faith *have been very Induſtrious and Active, ever ſince the happy* Reformation *of our* Religion, *to reduce the* Superſtitions *of the* Roman *Church once more into* Ours. *That ſuch Attempts may not onely be ſtill continued, but proſecuted with greater*

Vigour, *the* Emiſſaries *of* Rome, *taking occaſion from our late* Confuſions *and preſent* Indulgence, *have encouraged themſelves to come amongſt us, as all men believe, in unuſual* numbers, *though not without their wonted* Diſguiſe *and* Vizards. *What their Buſineſs is, no man is ignorant; and that they want no* Arts *to carry on their* Deſigns, *who doth not know? If* Flattery *and* Courtſhip *can prevail with* Perſons of Quality; *if external* Pomp *and* Pageantry *can prevail with our* Ladies of Honour; *if* Oſtentation *and ſhews of* Devotion *can prevail with* Religious *and* Pious *Souls*; *if* Indulgence *and* Liberty *can move the man of* Pleaſure; *if* Gold *and* Silver *can tempt the* Poor; *if Promiſes of* Pardon *can work upon and win over the* Guilty; *if* Sophiſtry *and* Fallacies *can*

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perſwade the Weak *and* Ignorant, *they want them not.*

But certainly, that which gives our Enemies the greater Advantage againſt us is, the groſs Ignorance *and deſperate* Debauchery *of this unhappy Age wherein we live; the* Ignorant *Perſon doth not* know, *the* Debauched *Perſon doth not* care, *what Religion is beſt. 'Tis no difficult Task for ſome ſubtle* Prieſt *or* Jeſuit *to* reaſon *an* Ignorant *man out of his Faith; nor is it an hard matter to* perſwade *a* Vicious *Perſon, that* hath no *Religion indeed, to* pretend any, *even the* Roman, *if ſome ſecular Advantage doth ſo require.*

Theſe Conſiderations might well give me juſt occaſion to compoſe theſe Sermons; wherein my preſent Deſign was, to confirm my own Pariſhioners *in their*

their preſent Faith, *and to warn them againſt all* Temptations *to the* Roman. *That I have now made them* publick, *'tis not as if I thought that the* Church *of* England *wants them: no; whoſoever is acquainted with the Works of our* Learned *and* Reverend Divines *already extant*, Hooker, Whitaker, Reynolds, Jewel, Laud, Morton, Davenant, Featly, *and many other*, deceaſed *or yet* alive, *muſt needs acknowledge, that as there is no Church ſo capable of a ſound Defence as ours, ſo there is none better provided with it.*

But yet notwithſtanding, as the very little Finger *may afford ſome* Help *even to the* ſtrongeſt Arm, *ſo perhaps the* weakeſt *of God's Servants may lend ſome* ſmall Aſſiſtance *towards the* eſtabliſhment *of that* Religion *which is*

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already ſo well maintained with the ſtrongeſt Arguments, *and thoſe managed by better* Heads *and* Hands.

My former experiences of your Lordſhip's *Favour have emboldned me to dedicate this Diſcourſe to your Lordſhip's* Name; *not that I think it* worth *your* View, *but that I know it* wants *ſo* great *a* Protection. *No man can blame me for chuſing ſuch a* Guardian, *whom the world knows to be ſo* willing *to* encourage *the* Friends *of True Religion, and ſo* able *to* confute *its* Adverſaries. *And the Truth is, I am not in the leaſt Capacity, by any other means to teſtifie that cordial* Reſpect *and* Veneration *which my ſelf, and every man elſe that loves our* Church, *muſt needs have for your* Lordſhip's *inward* Worth, *and Perſonal* Excellencies: *nor could I think of any other way to*

make

make a Gratefull *and* Publick *Acknowledgement of thoſe various Obligations which your* Lordſhip *hath laid upon*

the meaneſt of God's Servants

and

our Churche's Sons,

FRAN. GREGORY.

THE TRIALL OF RELIGIONS;

WITH

CAUTIONS to the Members of the *Reformed* Church againſt Defection to the *Roman.*

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1 THESS. 5. 21.

Prove all things; hold faſt that which is good.

WE reade in *Sacred Writ* and *Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory*, that the *Chriſtian* Church in its *infancy*, as well as the *Jewiſh* in its *elder years*, had in it ſeveral perſons that were *really endued* by God with the *ſpirit* of *Prophecy*; and others, who did but *pretend* it. Where-ever *God* had his *Church*, the *Devil* endeavoured to have his *Synagogue* too. To that end, it was the great deſign and policy of *Hell*, to ſend its *Reſidentiaries* and *Le-*

gates amongſt thoſe perſons where *Heaven* had its commiſſioned and faithfull *Embaſſadours*. If *Chriſt* ſend forth his *Simon Peter* ; the *Devil* will ſend forth his *Simon Magus* too: if *Chriſt* ſend forth a Saint *John*, a Saint *Paul*, and other *Apoſtles* ; the *Devil* will not fail to ſend forth a *Cerinthus*, a *Marcion*, and other *Hereticks* too.

The *true Prophets* of thoſe times did reveal nothing elſe but what was certainly the *mind* of *God* : but the *falſe Prophets* and *counterfeit Apoſtles* delivered the *Suggeſtions* of *Satan*, or at beſt the *Dreams* and *Fancies* of their *own* fantaſtick *brain*. And yet ſo politick was the *Devil*, that he veiled his *Errours* with a diſguiſe of *Truth* ; and that with ſo much artifice, that it was no eaſie matter for the young *Novices* of that Age, who were but lately become *Proſelytes* to *Chriſt*, to diſtinguiſh betwixt *falſe* Doctrines and *true*, betwixt *tares* and *wheat*, betwixt the *Devil's counterfeit*, and *God's* real *Pearls*.

In this conjuncture of time, when *Hereticks* pretended to be *Evangeliſts* ; when wild *Enthuſiaſts*, acted by the *Devil*, pretended to be *inſpired* of *God* ; when at the ſame *ſeaſon*, and in the ſelf-ſame *places*, Divine *Truths* were preached by ſome, and devilliſh *Errours* broached by others ; the Servants of God and Apoſtles of *Chriſt*, who were entruſted with the Concerns of his *Church* and the care of his *Souls*, could not but think themſelves obliged to do whatever in them lay, that their late Converts to the Chriſtian Faith might not either unwarily *admit* what was *indeed* an *Errour*, nor yet unadviſedly *reject* what was *indeed* a *Truth*.

To prevent this double Hazzard, Saint *John* (1 *John* 4. 1.) doth thus command them, *Try the ſpirits, whether they are of God*. There was, it ſeems, even thus

thus early in the Church a great *variety* of *ſpirits*; οἱ ὄντως προφῆται, ſaith *Theophylact*, οἱ ψευδοπροφῆται, καὶ ψευδαπόστολοι, ſaith *Oecumenius*; Prophets *true*, and prophets *falſe*: and yet even theſe *Impoſtours* too pretended to be from *God*. Well, what muſt the *Chriſtians* doe in ſuch a caſe as this? Muſt they receive *all* Doctrines, becauſe *ſome* were certainly true? or muſt they reject *all*, becauſe *ſome* were certainly falſe? No ſuch matter; the *Apoſtle* gives them and us another Rule to walk by: and that's this, Δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα, *Try the ſpirits*. Be not *raſh* in *receiving*, be not *raſh* in *rejecting* neither. Perhaps the Doctrines that are delivered by ſuch and ſuch may be from *God*; and if ſo, what a ſin would it be to *ſlight* them? but withall, 'tis poſſible that ſuch and ſuch Doctrines, delivered by ſuch and ſuch Pretenders, may be from the *Devil*; and if ſo, what a danger muſt it be to *entertain* them? Wherefore that both *extremes* may be avoided, that ye may be able to diſtinguiſh *Truth* from *Errour*, that ye may know the *Devil's Emiſſaries* from *Chriſt's Apoſtles*, μετὰ δοκιμασίας κρίνετε, ſaith *Theophylact*; *prove*, *examine*, paſs a mature and deliberate Judgment: and that's one great part of that advice which Saint *Paul* gives us in the Text, Δοκιμάζετε πάντα, *Prove all things*. Whatever Doctrine is broached among you, though it bring along with it the faireſt pretences imaginable, yet becauſe it may poſſibly prove too *light*, put it in the *balance*, and try its *weight*; becauſe it may poſſibly prove a *counterfeit*, bring it to the *Touchſtone*, and try its *ſincerity*: and if, upon this ſtrict enquiry, it prove not *right*, let it goe; but if it be found *Orthodox*, ſound and good, κατέχετε, *hold it faſt*.

So then the *Text* commends to our Practice a

double Act, each of which relates to matters of *Religion*. For,

1. We are required δοκιμάζειν, to *prove* them, to *examine* all *Doctrines*, *Principles* and *Practices*, whether they be *right*, such as the *Holy Scriptures recommend*, or at least *allow*. 'Tis our business to consider, as *Cornelius à Lapide* words it, *an sint Prophetiæ, an instinctus spiritûs humani*, whether they are the *Revelations* of *God*, or the *Inventions* and Imaginations of *men*.

2. We are required, after this strict *Examination* and *Judgement* passed, to *dismiss* whatever is *naught*, but to *retain* and *hold fast* that, *all* that, and *onely* that, which proves to be *good*, and consequently from *God*. So that the whole business of the *Text* will lie in these Two Conclusions.

1. *That every person whatsoever is highly obliged to examine the nature of that Religion which is recommended to him.*

2. *That after an impartial and strict Enquiry, that Religion, and onely that, which proves to be good, right and true, must be stoutly asserted, constantly retained, and held fast for ever.*

The First Doctrine.

That all persons whatsoever do highly stand obliged to examine the nature of that Religion which is recommended to them. But here two things may be demanded.

1. It may be demanded, whether *all* persons whatever are fit to *judge* for *themselves* in matters of Religion. Is *every* man so well qualified, as to be in a *capacity* of defining Points of *Faith* and *Worship*?

Shall

Shall every illiterate and bold *Mechanick* preſume ſo far, as to *ſuſpect* any *Doctrine* which the *Church* delivers, or *ſcruple* any *Practice* which ſhe recommends? I anſwer:

Certain it is, there is a very *ſignal reſpect* and a very *great veneration* due to the *Church* of *God*; and doubtleſs, where matters are *difficult* and Points are *controverted*, 'tis our ſafeſt courſe to conſider the Determination of the *true* Church, and to acquieſce in *Her* Judgement rather then in our *own*. But in other caſes, where the Word of *God* is *expreſs* and plain, where we have an *intelligible* and eaſie Rule, we are not obliged to take up our Religion upon *other* mens *credit* in thoſe matters wherein our *own Reaſon* can beſt ſecure us.

'Tis our Saviour's command, (*Matt.* 11. 15.) *He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear:* ſo ſay we, *He that hath an eye to ſee, let him ſee.* Methinks where the *Object* is *clear* and viſible, eſpecially if it be of *great concern* too, it were high *Imprudence* to rely upon *another* man's ſight, ſince God hath given us eyes of our *own*, that may *ſee* as *well*, and be *truſted better*. And certainly, it were an *act* of the greateſt *folly*, to depend barely upon *other* mens judgements for thoſe grand Concerns of *Eternity*, about which *God* hath given us *rational Souls* and all other *means* that are *ſufficient* and *requiſite* to inform *our ſelves*. But if perhaps through *ſin* and *vice* we have *debauched* our own *Reaſon*; if we have *extinguiſhed* that *light* which our great *Creatour* ſet up within us, and by ſo doing have *diſabled* our ſelves to obey the *Command* in my *Text*; we have then juſt *occaſion* to condemn *our ſelves*, but none to blame that *God*, who did as well *give* us an *eye*, as *bid* us *ſee*. And doubtleſs,

ſince

ſince *God* hath given to *every* man an *underſtanding* faculty and the uſe of *Reaſon*, to be employed for his own advantage, it muſt needs be the very higheſt *Tyranny* to interdict any perſon the *improvement* and exerciſe of that *Reaſon*, but eſpecially about the *great Concerns* of that immortal *Soul*, wherein that *Reaſon* of his hath its proper *Seat* and onely *Reſidence*.

And ſince this *perſonal* and private *examination* of our *Religion* is that which our *God commands*, and our *Reaſon* doth *enable* us to; methinks no *true Church* of *Chriſt* ſhould ever *diſlike* or quarrel at it: 'tis not poſſible that a *true Church* ſhould *diſallow* what *God requires*; 'tis not poſſible that a *true Mother* ſhould rob her *Children* of that without which they can neither be *Chriſtians* nor *Men*. No; 'tis for the *Whore* of *Babylon* to cloſe up her *baſtards* eyes, leſt perhaps they ſhould *diſcover* the *nakedneſs* of their Mother: 'tis for the *Church* of *Rome* to deny her *Proſelytes*, in all matters of *Religion*, the *exerciſe* of their *own Reaſon*, leſt perhaps they ſhould detect the *weakneſs* and *want* of *hers*. But as for the *Church* of *England*, ſo ſure is ſhe that her *Religion* is *right*, that ſhe doth not onely *allow*, but *encourage*, her Sons to bring it to the *Teſt*: ſuch are her *Doctrines* and ſuch are her *uſages*, that ſhe doth rather *provoke*, then *decline*, the ſtricteſt *Triall*: the *Truths* which ſhe *teacheth* are ſo *Divine*, the *Cuſtomes* which ſhe *retains* are ſo *Apoſtolical*, that, like ſo many true and orient *Pearls*, the more they are *examined*, ſearched and tried, the *brighter* do they *ſhine*. And if ſo, if to *examine* the matters of our *Religion* be an act of *Obedience* to *God*, if it be the way to bring *honour* to our *Church* and *ſatisfaction* to *our ſelves*, what ſhould hinder

der us, except it be that *groſs* and foul *Ignorance* of ours, which will indeed *deſtroy* our *Ability*, but never *take off* our *Obligation*? But,

2. From this great Command in the *Text*, *Prove all things*, it may be yet demanded thus, Muſt we then turn *Scepticks* in *Religion*? muſt we *always* hang in *doubt*, and *never fix*? muſt we *for ever* be *examining*, and ſo come to no *ſettled Reſolution* in Points of *Faith* and *Worſhip*? I anſwer:

'Tis certain that theſe *Inferences* can never be gathered from that which *God* requires in the *Text*: our *proving all things* will be ſo far from *introducing Scepticiſm* and uncertainties in matters of *Religion*, that 'tis the ſureſt way in the world to *expell*, baniſh and root them out; it will be ſo far from *ſhaking* our *Faith*, that 'tis indeed the moſt likely means to *ſettle* and *confirm* it. For when once a man hath duly meaſured the *Grounds*, Principles and Practices of his *Religion* by that *Rule* which cannot fail him, and there finds it *ſtraight* and right, all his *Jealouſies* and Doubts are over: What *Doctrine* ſoever he finds warranted by the *written Word*, that he may moſt ſafely *embrace*, and for ever *conclude* it to be from *God*.

'Tis in this caſe as it is with him that *ſuſpects* ſome piece of *money*, that is offered him as *current Coin*; if he brings it to the *Touchſtone*, *Scales*, or *Standard*, and there finds it *right Metall* and *full weight*, he receives it without farther *ſcruple*, and layeth it up as a part of his *Treaſure*. So here, ſuppoſe ſome *Novice* in *Chriſtianity*, ſuch as theſe in the *Text*, that is not yet well *grounded* in his *Religion*, is not ſufficiently *aſſured* whether ſuch and ſuch a *Doctrine* or *Practice*, that is commended to him, or required from

from him, be *right* or *wrong*; if he bring it to the *Scripture*, which is the great and onely *Standard* in this caſe, and there find a ſufficient warrant for it from ſome *Prophet*, *Evangeliſt*, or *Apoſtle*, with what *confidence* may he then receive it, and for ever moſt juſtly count it one part of his *Faith*? Well, ſuch ignorant *Novices* in *Chriſtianity* we all *are* or *have been*; and, upon that ſcore, if we have not already examined the *Principles* of our *Faith* and *grounds* of our *Religion*, we are obliged now to doe it. See why in ſome Particulars.

1. We are obliged to *examine* the nature and matters of our *Religion* by all that reſpect which we owe to the great, frequent and peremptory *Commands* of *God*.

This is that which the *Text* requires in terms as expreſs as can be, *Prove all things*. What *all things* doth he mean? Matters of *Religion* ſure; *Doctrinas*, *Revelationes*, &c. ſo *Eſtius*: whatever *Doctrines* are recommended to you as *Revelations* given from God, *diſcernite*, *dijudicate*, *examine*, *ſearch* and *judge* them. So much doth Saint *John* require too, when he thus commands us, (1 *John* 4.1.) *Try the ſpirits*. And thus Saint *Paul*, (2 *Cor.* 13.5.) *Examine your ſelves whether ye be in the faith*. Nay, our Bleſſed *Saviour* himſelf doth, in effect, enjoin the ſame thing too, when he gives us this Command, (*Matt.*7.15.) *Beware of falſe prophets*. God Almighty by theſe *Commands* hath revealed his pleaſure, that he would not have us *take up* ſuch and ſuch *Doctrines* at a *venture*, leſt perhaps they ſhould prove to be none of *his*; nor would he have us *unadviſedly cloſe with* ſuch and ſuch Religious *Practices*, leſt peradventure they ſhould prove ſuch as have no *warrant*.

That

That *God*, who highly *deſerves* and moſt juſtly *expects* whatever ſervice man can doe him, will be worſhipped in his *own* way; and *which* that is, and *where* it lieth, he bids us goe to his *own Book* and learn.

And methinks, had we no other Motive in the world to *examine* the matter of our *Religion* ſave onely this, yet *this* ſhould be enough; 'tis one of thoſe *Duties* which *Man* oweth his *Maker*; the ſtrict Examination of our Religion the Commands of God have made a conſiderable part thereof: ſo that it is impoſſible for us to *take up any Religion* upon *Truſt*, but we muſt, by ſo doing, *diſobey* our *God*, and thereby ſhew that in truth we have *none*. Sure it is, that we have a certain *Rule* and *Standard* to meaſure all Religions by; 'tis the ſignal *mercy* of *Heaven*: and to make a right uſe of that Standard, it is the great *Command* of *God*, and therefore the great *Obligation* of *Man* too.

2. We are obliged to *examine* our *Religion* by all that reſpect which we owe our *Neighbour*, our *Friend*, our *Child*.

That we are concerned not onely to *profeſs* a *Religion*, but *promote* it too, no man, I think, that hath one jot thereof will ever deny. We are bound by ſeveral obligations to inſtruct and *teach* our *Brother* the Principles of that Religion which we own *our ſelves*. 'Tis that which the *Scriptures* require over and over. Thus Saint *Paul*, (1 *Theſſ.* 5. 11.) *Edifie one another*: and ſo again, (*Col.* 3. 16.) *Teach and admoniſh one another*. We are engaged by the frequent *Commands* of *God*, and that eternal *Law* of *Charity*, in our *capacities*, and as occaſion is offered, to *propagate* our Religion; to *plant* it where it *is not*, and to *water* it where it *is*.

But then, methinks, we are deeply concerned to ſecure our ſelves and others too, that the *Religion* which we *advance* in the world be indeed the *Religion* of *God*; we muſt be ſure that we plant not *Weeds* in ſtead of *Flowers*, that we ſow not *Tares* in ſtead of *Wheat*: for, to promote a *Religion* that poſſibly may be *falſe*, were a deſperate venture indeed; and he that doth it hazards the *honour* of *God*, and the *Soul* of *man*. I find that our Bleſſed *Saviour* and his *Apoſtles* taught no *Doctrine* but what they were *ſure* of. Thus *Chriſt* tells *Nicodemus*, (*John* 3.11.) *We ſpeak that we know*: and thus Saint *John* tells the world, (1 *John* 3. 19.) *We know that we are of the truth*. Certainly, whoſoever *undertakes* or is *obliged* to inſtruct *another* in matters of Religion, had need very well be informed *himſelf*.

'Tis with us in our preſent caſe as with the *Phyſician* in his; who doubtleſs ſtands bound by whatſoever is dear unto him, to *preſcribe* no *Remedies* but ſuch as he throughly *underſtands*: That *Mountebank* deſerves a *Check* rather then a *Fee*, who dares adminiſter he knows not what; and, by ſo doing, is more like to *kill* then *cure*. The caſe is ours: We are all obliged to preſcribe our *Children* the *Rules* of life; we are all obliged to train up our *little ones* in the *fear* and worſhip of *God*; we are all obliged to direct our *Brother* in his way to *Heaven*: but if our Directions ſhould chance to prove *wrong*, what then? Suppoſe we inſtill into the minds of men *Errour* and *Hereſie* in ſtead of *Truth*, what would the iſſue be? Should ſome careleſs Father ſtrew *Ratsbane* in ſtead of *Sugar*, and thereby *poiſon* ſome dear child of his, whom probably he deſigned to *feed*, would not all the world condemn him? Well; this, and worſe then this,

this, doth that man doe, who, through a careleſs *Credulity* and want of a ſtricter *Enquiry*, doth ſcatter abroad where-ever he comes thoſe unſound *Opinions* and unknown *Errours*, which directly tend to the *ruine* of that Soul whom probably he deſigns to *ſave*.

'Tis indeed an act of *Charity* to *inſtruct* the *ignorant*, and *lead* the *blind*: but withall, the man muſt have eyes in his *own* head that undertakes it. Our Saviour hath told us, (*Matt.* 15. 14.) *If the blind lead the blind*, there is danger in it; 'tis like enough they may both *fall* and *periſh* in the *ditch*. And if ſo, ſince we are all bound to direct and guide one another in the way to Heaven; ſince we are all obliged to promote the *Worſhip* of *God* and the *Salvation* of *men*; let us moſt ſtrictly *enquire* into thoſe matters of *Religion* wherein we are to *inſtruct* and help our *Brother*: for if not, 'tis like enough that we may be *cheated*; what we *raſhly* take for the *Doctrines* of *Chriſt*, may perhaps, upon a *review*, prove the *Doctrines* of *Devils*; what we unadviſedly take for the *Inſtitutions* of *God*, may perhaps, upon a *ſtricter ſurvey*, prove nothing elſe but the *Impoſtures* of *men*: and if once we come to propagate theſe, what greater *pleaſure* can we doe the *Devil?* what greater *diſſervice* can we doe the *Church* of *God?* what greater *injury* can we doe our *Neighbour*, our boſom *Friend*, our darling *Child?* Certain it is, we are much engaged to *ſift* the Grounds of that Religion which we are to *propagate* in the world and teach our Brother; leſt otherwiſe, through our own *miſtake* and idle *confidence*, we become guilty of *cruel Charity*, and prove inſtrumental to *damn* that *Soul* whom we intend and are *obliged* to *ſave*.

3. We are obliged to *examine* our *Religion*, and ſee 'tis right, by all that kind reſpect which we owe the *Church* and *Nation* where we dwell.

That the *Welfare* of *Kingdomes* doth but little depend upon the *truth* of their *Religion*, may perhaps be objected from that known example of the *Turks* and ſome other *Nations*, where *Idolatry* reigns, and yet *ſucceſs*, power and wealth attends them: But ſurely that *ſuch* Nations flouriſh, 'tis not from any *Covenant* or Promiſe, but from the general *Providence*, and perhaps the *Wrath*, of God: 'tis not from the *conſideration* of *their* Religion, but rather from the *want* of *ours*. *Solomon* tells us, (*Prov.* 14.34.) *Righteouſneſs exalts a nation.* Yea, where *Vertue thrives*, where true *Religion flouriſheth*, 'tis ſure that *Kingdome* will do ſo too. We reade that whileſt the *Jews* retained their Religious Worſhip in its *Purity*, they were a *rich* and thriving Nation, *beloved* of *God*, and therefore *feared* of *men*: but when once they ſuffered *Idolatry* and *Superſtition* to ſteal in amongſt them, 'tis very remarkable, that *this* very ſin proved the *ſubverſion* of their *State*, and the *ruine* of their *Church*.

Methinks this dreadfull Inſtance ſhould make us exceeding wary what Religions we admit amongſt us. Certainly it will be our wiſedom not to *permit*, much leſs to *eſtabliſh* by Law, any Doctrine whatever that hath already been not onely *ſuſpected*, but, upon mature advice, *condemned* too; except we are now fully ſatisfied by clearer Arguments, that it is at leaſt *reconcilable* to thoſe *Divine Truths* which our *Saviour* hath *taught*, and our *God approves*.

For if we doe otherwiſe, if our *Folly*, *Careleſneſs*, *Ignorance* or *Vice* ſhall prove a means to *retrive* thoſe

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erroneous Doctrines and *ſuperſtitious Practices* which the *wiſedom*, *Piety* and *Zeal* of our *Fore-fathers* have juſtly baniſhed; if we ſhall reduce thoſe ſuperfluous, vain and burthenſome *Ceremonies* of the *Roman Church* which our noble *Progenitours* have ſo deſervedly *exploded*; if we ſhall baſely let goe thoſe great and concerning *Truths* which our *heroical Anceſtours* have derived unto us *ſealed* with their deareſt *bloud*; if we ſhall exchange a *good Religion* for a *bad*; what can we expect, but that our holy *God*, who is ſo *jealous* of his great *Name*, ſhould be angry with us, even till he hath quite *conſumed* us? It is true, *God* indeed may bear with the *Idolatries* of poor ignorant *Turks* and *Pagans*, who neither *do* nor *can* know what's better: But as for this *Nation* of *ours*, we have his *Law* and his *Prophets*, we have his *Evangeliſts* and his *Apoſtles*, we have the *Goſpel* of his dear *Son* to *confirm* and ſettle us in our moſt holy *Faith*: and if ſo, ſhould *we* turn *Apoſtates*, ſhould *we* embrace a *falſe* Religion and become *Idolaters*, ſo *dreadfull* would the Conſequences be, that we may juſtly *tremble* ſo much as once to *name* them.

If therefore we have any *bowels* of mercy towards the *womb* that *bore* us, if we have any *kindneſs* for the *breaſts* that *feed* us, if we have any *compaſſion* for the *Nation* that *warms* and *cloaths* us; let us never cloſe with any *other* Religion, except it produce ſome better *warrant* then our preſent *Church* can ſhew; and that not from a *Prieſt*, not from a *Jeſuit*, not from ſome *pretended*, forged and abuſed *Father*; but from a *Prophet*, from an *Evangeliſt*, from an *Apoſtle*, one of whom is of more *value* and greater *credit* then the whole *Romiſh Conclave* and all their *Councils*, though every member thereof were a better man and more *Infallible*, even the beſt of *Popes*.

4. We

4. We are obliged to *examine* our *Religion* by all that reſpect which we owe unto *our ſelves*. See why in 2 Particulars.

1. That man who never troubleth himſelf to ſearch into the *Grounds* of his Religion, and by infallible Arguments to ſecure himſelf that his *Faith* and *Worſhip* is *ſound* and right, muſt needs be in *doubt* whether it be good or no. For 'tis very poſſible that the *Report* which he hears concerning it may be *falſe*; the *perſons* that recommend it to him may be *miſtaken*; his *Fore-fathers*, from whom he derives his Religion, might be *deceived*; nay, that *particular Church* whereof he is a Member may poſſibly be in an *Errour* too. For, tell me, how groſly was the *Church* of the *Jews* miſtaken, though they had all the *Prophets* to inform them, concerning *that* which they were *moſt obliged* to know, the *Perſon*, *Doctrine* and *Miracles* of their *own Meſſias?* and how ſtifly doth the *Church* of *Rome* this day contend for thoſe *foul Errours* and *abominable Superſtitions*, for which there is very little to be pleaded, ſave onely the *Practice* and *Tradition* of their *Predeceſſours*; amongſt whom *Ambition*, *Pride*, *Avarice*, *Luxury* and *Ignorance* did ſo prevail, that they had little of *true Religion* left to *tranſmit* and bequeath to their *Poſterity?* ſo that to believe as the *Church* believes, is to believe, at beſt, but at a *venture*; and he that doth ſo, hath no *aſſurance* that his Faith is right. Now what *Inconveniences* will ariſe from bare *Doubts*, *Jealouſies* and *Suſpicions* of our *Religion*, we may ſee in 2 Particulars.

1. That perſon who is thus *uncertain* and doubtfull of his *Religion* can never expect any great ſatisfaction, comfort, pleaſure, in any of thoſe *Religious acts* which he doth perform. Doubt-

Doubtleſs, that *Joy* which ariſeth to a *good* man and *knowing* Chriſtian from the true *Service* of *God* is very conſiderable and exceeding great. *My ſoul ſhall be ſatisfied as with marrow and fatneſs*, ſaith holy *David*, who well *knew* what he did, when he ſerved his God *thus* and *thus*. And without all controverſie, there is not ſo much *delight* to be found in *any* thing whatever, as there is in the *Worſhip* of *God*. The conſideration of God's ſpecial *Preſence*, his favourable *Interpretation* of our *deſires*, his kind *Acceptance* of our poor *endeavours*, the *Smiles* of his *Countenance*, the *Teſtimony* of his *Spirit*, how do they fill the *heart* with *Joy*?

But withall, ſure it is, that theſe things cannot be expected by that Soul who is not *ſure* that his *Religion* is *right*. If a man be *uncertain* whether he preſent to *God* a *ſheep* or a *ſwine*, a *lamb* or a *dog*, what *Acceptance* can he look for? If a man be *doubtfull* whether he offer up to his Maker *incenſe* or *ſnuffe*, *ſacrifice* or *ſin*, how doth he know whether he doth *pleaſe* his *God*, or *provoke* him? The *Scriptures* tell us, (*Rom.* 14. 23.) *Whatſoever is not of faith is ſin*. And if ſo, that perſon who dares perform ſuch and ſuch an *act* at a *venture*, whether *right* or *wrong*, hath cauſe enough to expect from *God* a *Frown* rather then a *Smile*, and a *Check* rather then a *Commendation*. Wherefore if ever we deſire to feel the *Comforts* of Divine *Worſhip*, if ever we deſire to taſte the *pleaſures* of God's *Service*, it muſt be our *care*, and 'tis our *Concern*, to *ſecure* our ſelves, by infallible Arguments, that our *Religion* is *ſuch* indeed as our *God requires*, *likes*, and *bleſſeth*.

2. That perſon who doth but onely *ſuſpect* and *doubt* the truth of his *Religion*, though peradventure it

it may be *ſound* and *right*, yet notwithſtanding he will be eaſily moved to *renounce* and leave it, if not through *perſwaſions* and *flatteries*, yet at leaſt through *cowardiſe* and *fear* of *ſuffering*.

Indeed, that *prudent* and *pious* Chriſtian who hath throughly *examined* the nature of his *Religion*, and is fully *convinced* and *ſatisfied* that it is indeed the *Religion* of *God*, dares not part with it upon *eaſie*, nor indeed upon *any* terms whatſoever: but that *uncertain* and *wavering* Soul, who, having never *taſted* the matchleſs *Pleaſures* of *Religion*, doth ſtill lie under *ſuſpence* and *jealouſies*, whether that *Profeſſion* which he yet owneth be *right* or *wrong*, how eaſily will he *quit* it? If perhaps ſome other *Religion* be recommended to him by ſuch and ſuch perſons whom he loves, how *quickly* will he yield? If ſuch and ſuch a *Profeſſion* be urged upon him by ſuch and ſuch *plauſible Arguments*, which perhaps he cannot anſwer, how *ſoon* will he be perſwaded? If perhaps he be fairly *invited* to embrace ſuch and ſuch *Doctrines* by *Promiſes* and *Hopes* of *advantage*, how *ſoon* will he give his conſent? Or if perhaps he be preſſed to own ſuch and ſuch *Practices* by *Threats* and Menaces, how *ſuddenly* will he condeſcend?

True it is, we are commanded, and that under the pain of eternal death, if need be, to *ſuffer* for our *Religion*: a *Gaol*, a *Dungeon*, a *Gibbet*, *Fire* and *ſword*, whatever *Devils* can *invent* or *Tyrants inflict*, muſt be endured, if *God* ſo *pleaſe*, and *Times* ſhould ſo *require*. But, tell me, will *that* man doe this, that *queſtions* whether his *Religion* be *true* or not? Can we think that *he* who *doubts*, will *die* too? Is it imaginable that *he* who is not throughly *ſatisfied* that ſuch and ſuch *Doctrines* are certainly of *God*, will

ever

ever confirm and *ſeal* them with his *bloud?* Every man will tell you, that *Eſtates*, *Liberties* and *Lives* are things of greater *value* then to be thrown away upon bare *Peradventures* and *Poſſibilities:* 'tis not credible that any man will loſe what he counts ſo dear, in the defence of his *Religion*, except he be firſt convinced that this *Religion* of his is ſo *good*, ſo *holy*, ſo *Divine*, that the *Vindication* thereof will infallibly turn his *bloud* into a *Sacrifice*, and his *death* into a *Martyrdom.*

Thus Saint *Paul*, (2 *Tim.* 1. 12.) *For this cauſe I ſuffer theſe things.* What things doth he mean? *Perſecutions*, *reproaches*, *bonds*, *impriſonments*, and indeed what not? But why all this? Himſelf tells us in the ſelf-ſame Verſe, *I know whom I have believed, and I am perſwaded*, &c. When a man *knoweth* his Faith is right, when he is fully *perſwaded* that his *Religion* will certainly bear him out and make up all his loſſes, O with what *alacrity* and chearfulneſs may he *ſuffer?* But on the other hand, if we are not *acquainted* with the goodneſs and *excellence* of our *Profeſſion*, but continue *ſtrangers* to it, how eaſily ſhall we *ſhake* hands with it, and, in ſtead of being noble and faithfull *Martyrs*, become ſo many unworthy *Renegadoes*, and prove, like *Julian*, falſe and baſe *Apoſtates?*

2. That perſon who takes no care to *inform* and *ſatisfie* himſelf concerning the matters of his *Religion*, but *takes* it up as he *finds* it, may very eaſily be *miſtaken*, and cloſe with a *wrong* in ſtead of a *right.*

So great is the *variety* of *Religions* in the world, ſo *politick* is the *Devil*, ſo *plauſible* is the *Heretick*, ſo *ſubtle*, ſmooth and inſinuating is the *Jeſuit*, that if we have not a *watchful eye* and a *diſcerning ſpirit*, if we

are not the more carefull to *enquire* of *God* and *good men*, 'tis like enough that their *fair* and ſpecious *Pretences* may deceive us. 'Tis very poſſible that *Vice* and *Vertue*, *Truth* and *Errour*, the *Counterfeit* and the *Pearl*, may *look* ſo like to another, that there is none but an *Artiſt*, who hath a *prudent Head* and a *piercing Eye*, that can readily apprehend and ſee the *difference*.

That ſeverall perſons are moſt miſerably trepanned and ſadly deluded, the Scriptures tell us. Thus the Evangeliſt, (*John* 16. 2.) *Whoſoever killeth you will think that he doeth God good ſervice.* Here's *Murther* took to be *Religion*, and innocent *bloud* thought to be a *Sacrifice*. Saint *Paul* himſelf was thus deceived, (*Acts* 26.9.) *I verily thought with my ſelf, that I ought to doe many things contrary to the name of Jeſus:* but what made him think ſo? he tells us elſewhere, *ſin deceived me*, (*Rom.*7. 11.) And certainly if Saint *Paul*, that *eminent* and *learned* man, were thus miſtaken; if ſuch an one as *he* took *Perſecution* to be *Devotion*, *Sin* to be *Service*, and an high *Treſpaſs* to be a *Duty*; how then are *we* concerned to take heed, leſt we take up ſomething for *Religion* which indeed is not ſo? leſt we cloſe with ſuch and ſuch *Superſtitions* and *Vanities*, and yet count our ſelves *devout* in doing ſo? O remember how *eaſie* and *uſual* it is to be miſtaken. If we take up our *Religion*, as it ſeems *Jacob* did his *wife*, upon *truſt* and in the *dark*, 'tis like enough that we may be *cheated*; 'tis like enough that, in ſtead of being that *beautiful Rachel* which we expected, it may prove no better then a *blear-eyed Leah*. And if ſo, what grand *Inconveniences* are like to follow, give me leave to ſhew you, though but in 2 Particulars.

1. That

1. That perſon who is *miſtaken* in the *choice* of his *Religion*, if he be, what *Religious* perſons *ſhould* be, *devout* and *zealous* in his way, is in great danger to run himſelf upon the commiſſion of the greateſt *ſin*; except, perhaps, he can plead an *invincible Ignorance* for its extenuation.

Doubtleſs, whoſoever he be that makes *Religion* the main *buſineſs* of his life, will think himſelf concerned to *promote* that *Religion* which he owns and takes to be true, and that with *vehemence* and *zeal*. 'Tis the *nature* of *Religion*, whether true or falſe, to *propagate*, ſpread and eſtabliſh it ſelf; and that it may ſo doe, it becomes *importunate* and reſtleſs, till it have removed, by *force* or *argument*, what-ever ſeems to ſtand in its way, and be its *Rival*.

And if ſo, O what a *dangerous* perſon is every *miſtaken Zealot!* Sure it is, of all *Villains* in the world the *Religious Villain* is the worſt. As for *other* Villains, who are inwardly convinced that what they doe is *naught* and wicked, they cannot chuſe but now and then find ſome *remorſe*, regret, and ſuch *checks* within them, as muſt needs *damp* their *ſpirits*, and *gall* their *ſouls*, and put ſome little *ſtop* to their Iniquity: But as for the *Devout* and *Pious Villain*, what *Trouble* can poſſibly invade *his* ſpirit? what *Pangs* of Soul can *he* feel within him? what can make *him* ſo much as once *demurr* and pauſe in the leaſt, when his own *Conſcience*, being *miſinformed* and ſadly deluded, doth ſo far *chear* him, as to bid him expect a *reward* for that *Sin*, which it doth not onely *repreſent*, but *commend* and applaud, as a *Duty* which *God requires*, and will certainly *bleſs?* We need no other *Inſtance* in this caſe but that great one of Saint *Paul:* Whileſt he believed the old *Religion* of the

Jews to be the onely *true* one, whileſt he was poſſeſſed with *Prejudice* againſt *Chriſtianity*, and took the *Goſpel* to be but a meer *Juggle*, a new *Impoſture*, and a *falſe* way of worſhip, what ſtrange havock did he make of the *Church* of *Chriſt*, and that in the *defence* of a *wrong* Religion, and the *Perſecution* of a *right*? All the excuſe which he pleads for himſelf is onely this, *I did it through Ignorance.* Yea, had but Saint *Paul's knowledge* then been as great as his *zeal*; he would rather have laid *himſelf* then *others* in the *Gaol:* had he but *examined* matters aright, and found *Chriſtianity* to be indeed the *Religion* of *God*; he would have been ſo far from *ſhedding other* mens *bloud*, that, in the defence thereof, he would ten thouſand times rather have *loſt* his *own.*

But O the *direful* effects of a *miſtaken Zeal!* This is the thing to which we muſt aſcribe the moſt *inhumane* actions that the world ever ſaw. From hence proceeded that bloudy *Maſſacre* of *Paris*, and that unparallel'd and *helliſh Powder-Treaſon:* from hence hath proceeded the *Aſſaſſination* of *Princes*, the *Subverſion* of *Empires*, and the *Ruine* of *Churches.* And what if I tell you, that *miſapprehenſions* of *Religion* have hung the *Son* of *God* upon the *Croſs*, and laid his *Servants* in the *flames*? It cannot be imagined that the *Jews* would ever have crucified the *Saviour* of the World, and their *own Meſſias* too, had not an *ignorant Zeal* inclined them to it: Nor can we reaſonably conceive, that the *Papiſts* are ſuch *Monſters* rather then *men*, that they would ever have *burnt* ſo many *Martyrs*, had they not *thought* that *Religion* did require it. And if ſo, if the Conſequences of a *miſtaken* Religion be ſo dreadfull, then ſurely we are highly concerned to make ſure of the *Truth* of ours; leſt

leſt perhaps an *Errour* in our *choice* ſhould put us upon the Commiſſion of thoſe horrid *Crimes* which none but a *Religious* and *Zealous ſinner* dares *attempt*.

2. That perſon who is *miſtaken* in his *Religion* is very like to *loſe* that which is the bleſſed *fruit*, *reward* and *end* of that *Religion* which is *ſound*, true and right.

'Tis ſuch a Conſideration as, methinks, ſhould mightily quicken us to the duty in the Text, *Prove all things*. But why ſo? why? alas! a miſtake *here* would utterly *undoe* us. That the *Conſequences* of *Religion* are of the *greateſt concern* imaginable, 'tis beyond diſpute: ſo great, that it cannot be a thing *indifferent* whether our *Religion* be *right* or *wrong*; unleſs it be a thing *indifferent* too whether we are *bleſſed* or *curſed*, whether we ſhall to *Heaven* or *Hell*. That *Religion* which is *right* is the onely way, through *Chriſt*, that leads to *Heaven*; and that *Religion* which is *wrong* is one of the *neareſt* and *quickeſt* ways to *Hell*. I remember the Scriptures mention the *Doctrine* of *God*, the *Doctrine* of *Chriſt*, the *Doctrine* of the *Apoſtles*; theſe, being *embraced* and *obeyed*, will ſurely make us *happy*: but, on the other hand, the ſame Scriptures mention *other Doctrines*, *ſtrange Doctrines*, *the Doctrines of men*, yea and the *Doctrines of Devils* too, which being entertained will ſurely make us *miſerable*. But, you'l ſay, how ſhall we *know* them? how ſhall we paſs a *judgement*, whether ſuch and ſuch a *Doctrine* be indeed the *Doctrine* of *God*, *Devils*, or *men*? I anſwer:

1. All matters of *Religion* muſt be *examined*, proved and determined by the *written Word* of *God*. This is the onely ſure *Balance* to *weigh*, and *Touch-*

ſtone

ſtone to *try*, all matters of *Faith* and *Worſhip*.

To this the *Prophet* directs, (*Iſa.*8.20.) *To the Law and to the Teſtimony.* To this our *Saviour* ſends his hearers. (*Joh.*5.39.) *Search the Scriptures:* and again, *How readeſt thou?* And, which is remarkable, the *Ignorance* of *Scripture* doth he make the onely *occaſion* and *ground* of *Errour* in Points of *Faith:* ſo he tells the *Sadducees*, *Ye erre*; but why? *not knowing the Scriptures.* It ſeems, that it is the *written Word* of God which muſt be our *Guide* in matter of *Religion*; 'tis this which is the *onely infallible Rule* and *unalterable Standard* to *meaſure* all the *Doctrines* and *Practices* which ſuch or ſuch a *Church* doth teach, recommend, or require from us. But,

2. The *Decrees* of *General Councils*, thoſe I mean that were convened in the *firſt* and *pureſt* times, before the *Superſtitions* and *Idolatries* of *Rome*, that crept in by *degrees* through *Careleſneſs*, *Vice* and *Ignorance*, had overſpread the *Church*, are of great uſe in this caſe too.

True it is, the *Scripture* is man's onely *authentick* Rule to walk by; and this Rule of ours in the moſt *material* and *concerning* Points of *Faith* is *obvious*, *plain* and *eaſie:* but yet there are ſome other matters of *Religion*, though not of *abſolute Neceſſity*, yet of *conſiderable Import* and *moment*, about which the Scriptures are not ſo *intelligible*, at leaſt to *ordinary* Readers, but that they want ſome good *Interpreter*.

And who more fit to *declare* the *ſenſe* of doubtfull and difficult *Texts* then the *firſt* and *beſt* of *Councils*? I reade of the *Council* of *Nicæa*, called by *Conſtantine* the *Great*, againſt the *Hereſie* of *Arrius*; the *Council* of *Conſtantinople*, ſummoned by *Theodoſius* the *firſt*, againſt the *Hereſie* of *Macedonius*; the *Council* of *Epheſus*,

pheſus, called by *Theodoſius* the *ſecond*, againſt the *Hereſy* of *Neſtorius*; the *Council* of *Chalcedon*, called by *Martian*, againſt the *Hereſy* of *Eutyches*. Theſe *Councils*, occaſioned by theſe early *Hereſies*, and conſiſting of ſome hundred *Biſhops*, having the *Glory* of *God* in their *Hearts*, the *Settlement* of the *Church* in their *Eye*, and the *Bible* in their *Hands*, did eſtabliſh ſeveral *Canons* for the *extirpation* of *Errour*, and the *confirmation* of the moſt concerning *Truths* of our Religion.

And, certainly, the *Determinations* of theſe *Councils*, whether it be in the *great* or ſome *leſs* Concerns of our Religion, being made up of *Perſons* ſo *exemplary* for their *Piety*, and ſo *eminent* for their *Learning*, who reſolved on nothing but with *mature Advice* and *Deliberation*, are of as *great Authority*, and afford as much *ſatisfaction* in matters of Religion, as *any* thing of *man* can *be* or *doe*. For the *Truths* of *God*, once taught the world by *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles*, being *unchangeable* for ever; and our *Bibles*, which are the *onely Rule* to meaſure Religion by, continuing *one* and the *ſame* for ever; that which was an *Errour* in *thoſe* times muſt needs be *Errour ſtill*, and that which was a *Truth* in *thoſe* days muſt needs be a *Truth ſtill*. And if we cannot think of any more proper means for the right *underſtanding* of *Scripture*, and the *diſcovery* of *Truth* and *Errours*, then the *deliberate* and *unanimous* Judgment of ſo many *hundred pious*, *learned* and *unbiaſſed* men aſſembled together; then certainly the *Determinations* of thoſe *Ancient Councils* are very conſiderable Evidences *for Truth*, and *againſt Errour*: and the rather, becauſe they conſiſted of ſuch perſons, who, beſides their eminent *Piety* and *Learning*, had the great Advantage

of

of living *nearer* the *Apoſtles* Age; and thereby were the better able to inform *themſelves* and *us* too, what was certainly *believed* and *done* in the very *Infancy* of the *Church*.

3. The Writings of the *Ancient Fathers*, thoſe eſpecially that lived within the firſt *Six Centuries*, where-ever they *agree*, and are not ſince *corrupted* or *maimed* by the *fraud* and *forgeries* of the *Roman Church*, are of ſingular uſe in this matter too.

That *Ignatius*, *Clemens*, *Origen*, *Athanaſius*, *Cyril*, *Nazianzene*, *Baſil*, *Chryſoſtom*, *Hierom*, *Auguſtine*, and ſome others, were indeed Perſons of *great Devotion* and *excellent Parts*, cannot be denied. And although ſome of theſe *great Names*, in ſome particular matters, had their *peculiar Miſtakes*, and ſhew'd themſelves to be but *men*; yet in all Points where we find an *unanimous Conſent* amongſt them, we are to have ſo much *veneration* for their *Authority*, as not *eaſily* to *ſuſpect* or *contradict* it.

True it is, if we take theſe Fathers *ſingly*, man by man, where we find any of them *alone* in their Opinions, as *Origen* in reference to the *Puniſhments* of *Hell*, and Saint *Auguſtine* in reference to *Infants* that die *unbaptized*, we are not, in this caſe, much more obliged to accept *their Judgment* then the *Judgment* of ſome *perſon* yet *alive*, who perhaps may be as *Pious* and *Learned* as ſome of them: But if we take *all* the *Fathers* that lived within *ſix hundred* years after *Chriſt together* and in the *lump*, where we find them *one* in Judgment, they are enough to make a *wiſer Council* then any *one* Age could probably afford; a Council certainly of *more Value* and far *greater Credit* then that *Conventicle* of *Trent*, wherein there ſate, ſometimes at leaſt, little more then 40 *Biſhops*, and

and ſome of thoſe but meerly *Titular* and *ſuborned* too. And upon this ſcore the *Church* of *Rome* muſt needs excuſe us, that we do rather adhere to the *united Judgment* of ſo many *Ancient Fathers*, then to thoſe *late Decrees* and *Canons* of *Trent* which contradict them. 'Tis well known to our *Adverſaries* of *Rome*, that, in the great *Controverſies* betwixt us and them, we appeal to the moſt *Ancient Councils* and *Fathers*, whom we look upon as the moſt *impartial* and *able Judges*; the whole matter in *queſtion* we offer to their *Deciſion*, and are willing to *ſtand* or *fall* as *they* determine. But, alas! there's no *Tribunal* like Saint *Peter's Chair*, *one Pope* is of more *value* with them then *ten* Saint *Auguſtines*. Nor indeed can we blame them; for, where the *Cauſe* is notoriouſly *bad*, it were ſtrange *Imprudence* to refer it to any *other Umpires* and *Arbitratours*, ſave onely ſuch who are *prepoſſeſt* with the ſtrongeſt *Prejudice*, and *obliged* by the greateſt *Intereſts* to *defend* and *own* it. And thus ſtands the caſe with the *Roman Church*. But as for us, where *matters* are *doubtful* and *Scriptures* are not *clear*, we dare not run to *uncertain Traditions* and the *pretended Infallibility* of *Popes*, but rather to *Ancient Councils* and *Fathers*, from whom we do rationally expect more ſatisfactory *Reſolutions*, and far better *Comments*. But,

4. There are ſeveral *Syſtems* of *Divinity*, *Confeſſions* of *Faith*, ſhort *Abridgments* of *Chriſtian Religion*, that are, eſpecially to *unlearned perſons*, great helps in this matter too.

And here, methinks, thoſe *Ancient Creeds* of the *Apoſtles*, *Nice*, and *Athanaſius*, which are ſo generally received by the *Church* of *God*, are of great Authority to ſettle our Judgment in the main and moſt ne-

ceſſary *Points* of *Faith.* Whatever contradicts any *one Article* delivered and contained therein, may be juſtly ſuſpected of *Hereſie*, *Errour* and *Innovation.* And as for other *Doctrines*, *Practices*, and matters of *Diſcipline*, we may have recourſe, and that with good *ſatisfaction*, to the known *Articles* of the *Church* of *England*, the *Book* of *Homilies*, and that excellent *Liturgy* of ours, which that of Saint *Chryſoſtom* or *Baſil* doth not *tranſcend*, and perhaps not *match.*

Beſides theſe, there are many *choice* and excellent *Catechiſms*, compoſed by men that were *Pious*, *Learned* and *Judicious*, acquainted with *Scriptures*, well verſed in the *Primitive Councils* and *Fathers.* Theſe ſhort *Catechiſms*, compiled by perſons of ſingular Endowments, and *approved* by the *Church*, are little leſs then ſo many *contracted Bibles*, containing in them whatever man is obliged to *know*, and delivering enough, in *plain* and *eaſie* terms, to inform us in matters of *Practice*, to *ſecure* us from *Errours*, and *confirm* our *Judgments* in all the great *Points* of *Faith.*

So then, the Summe of all is this; We are obliged to *examine* the matters of our *Religion* by the *written Word* of *God*: but becauſe *this Word*, in ſome material caſes, according to the different *Fanſies* or *Intereſts* of men, hath *different Interpretations* given concerning its true *ſenſe* and meaning, 'tis our onely way, for our better ſatisfaction, to betake our ſelves to the moſt *able*, *faithful* and *unbiaſſed Judges*; and they are the moſt *Ancient Councils*, the *Primitive Fathers*, *publick Confeſſions* of *Faith*, and Orthodox *Catechiſms* ſet forth or approved by the *Church* of *God.*

Uſes.

Uſes.

I. Conſider how much to *blame* thoſe perſons are, who, without any Examination whatſoever, take up their *Religion* barely upon *Truſt*.

We are thus commanded in the Text, *Prove all things*: but, alas! we are ſo far from this, that we will prove *nothing*; and although perhaps we pretend to *abhorr* the *Religion* of *Rome*, yet ſo far do we act like *Papiſts*, that an *Implicit Faith* ſerves our turn.

'Tis the great *Imprudence* and *Crime* of many perſons, who are ſo *ſupine* and *careleſs*, that they *will not* examine their *Religion*; but, withall, 'tis the ſad *Calamity* of ſome others, who are ſo *ſottiſh* and *ignorant*, that indeed they *cannot*. That we are required to *prove* our *Faith*, and of what *concern* it is ſo to doe, we have already ſeen; and that all matters of this nature muſt be judged by the *Word* of *God*, and *that*, in *doubtful* caſes, to be expounded by *Ancient Councils* and *Fathers*, hath been already ſhewed: Yea, but what's all this to the man that's utterly *unlearned* and *ignorant*? Can *that* man prove his *Religion* by the *Word* of *God* who *knows* it *not*? can *that* man help himſelf in the underſtanding of difficult *Scriptures* by the Aſſiſtence of thoſe *Councils* and *Fathers* to whom he is but a *ſtranger*?

And this is the caſe of thoſe poor people who are bred up under the *Tyranny* of the *Roman Church*: they *cannot* obey the Command in my *Text*, becauſe they are kept in *Ignorance*; they *cannot* doe what Saint *John* requires, they *cannot try the ſpirits*, becauſe that onely *Touchſtone* is *denied* them; they are in no

capacity to *weigh* the matters of their *Religion*, becauſe they are not ſuffered ſo much as once to touch the *Scales*.

But, alas! this groſs *Ignorance*, which is *their* ſad *Calamity*, is *our* grievous *Crime*: that utter Inability of obeying God, and *proving all things*, which ariſeth from *their* invincible *Neceſſity*, ſprings from *our Careleſneſs* and *Choice*. 'Tis ſure enough, that we have ſufficient *means* to *inform* our ſelves of our *Religion*: we have *Bibles* to *reade* in our *families*; we have the *Scriptures expounded* in our *Churches*; we have many *excellent Catechiſms* and other *Books* within our reach: and yet *how ignorant* ſtill! We are ſo far from being able to give a *ſatisfactory* Account of our *Religion* in its ſeveral Branches, that there are many amongſt us who do not know ſo much as what *Religion* means, what *Chriſtianity* is, who *Chriſt* was, what he hath *done*, or what he *requires* from us. Certainly, if ſuch perſons do take upon them the profeſſion of *any* Religion, they muſt needs doe it upon *Truſt*: and how that's done, we may ſee in 3 Particulars.

1. There are ſome perſons who take up their Religion barely upon the *Truſt* and *Credit* of their *Parents* and *Progenitours*, who owned *ſuch* and *ſuch a Profeſſion*, and continued therein perhaps to their very dying-day.

And the truth is, the very higheſt Account that many an one can give for his *Faith* and *Worſhip* is but this, It was the *old Religion* of his *Family*, it was the *Faith* and *Worſhip* of his *Fathers*, and therefore *his* too: inſomuch that perſons generally are not *made*, but *born*, *Chriſtians*, as well as *men*; and do commonly receive their *Faith*, as well as their *Fleſh*,

Fleſh, *ex Traduce*, barely by *Propagation*.

'Tis true, *Chriſtianity*, which certainly is the *Religion* of *God*, is that which we *all* profeſs; but in the mean time there are but *few* amongſt us that *examine* the *Principles* upon which this *Religion ſtands*, nor do we conſider the *Deſigns* to which this *Religion tends*: onely we take it up from our *Fore-fathers*, as if it were barely *bequeathed* us amongſt other *Legacies*, or *left* us as a *part* of our *Inheritance*. It muſt be confeſſed, that true *Religion*, preſerved for us and tranſmitted to us by the *Care* and *Piety* of our *Progenitours*, is a bleſſed *Inheritance* indeed; *ſuch* an *Inheritance*, ſo *great* and ſo *glorious*, that we are concerned, if in *any* caſe, much more in *this*, to *prove* our *Father*'s *Will*, and to conſider how ſutable it is to both the *Teſtaments* of that *better Father*, which is in *Heaven*.

2. There are ſome perſons who take up their Religion barely upon the *Truſt* and *Credit* of *vulgar* and *publick Examples*.

What *Religion* we find eſtabliſhed in the *Kingdom*, exerciſed in the *Church*, and commonly profeſſed throughout the *Neighbourhood*, that we do not ſtand to *examine*, but *immediately embrace*: We make our *Faith* a matter not of *Election* and *Choice*, but barely of *Imitation*. Doubtleſs, there's many a Soul amongſt us that profeſſeth himſelf to be a *Chriſtian*, not becauſe he *knoweth* the *Truth*, *Reaſonableneſs* and *Excellence* of *Chriſtianity*, but becauſe he had the *good fortune* to be *bred* and *live* in *Chriſtendome*.

Suppoſe a man bred among the *Perſians*; this man *adores* the *Sun*, and makes *that* his *Deity*: take a man bred amongſt the *Turks*; this man's *Bible* is the

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Alcoran, and that *Impoſtour Mahomet* little leſs then his *God*: Suppoſe a man bred up in *Spain*, *France*, or *Italy*; this man, forſooth, though he knows not why, proves a *Roman Catholick*; he owns the *Pope*, let him be who he will, to be his *Grand-father*, and that *Church*, or, if you will, that *Whore*, to be his *Grand-mother* too: Well; give me a man bred up in *England*; 'tis ten to one but *this* man proves a *Proteſtant*. But why all this? Why, alas! we take up our *Religion*, not from the *Convictions* of our *own Judgments*, but barely from the *force* of *Examples*, and the meer *power* of *Education*.

3. There are ſome perſons who take up their Religion upon the *Truſt*, *Credit*, or *Commands* of *Princes*.

Certainly, man, who is a *wiſe*, *knowing* and *noble* Creature, of the very *next* degree to *Angels*, may eaſily convince himſelf, how *unreaſonable* a thing it is, that he ſhould *adore* and *worſhip* any thing that is ſo far from being a *Deity*, that he evidently ſeeth and certainly knoweth that it is his *own Inferiour* and much *below* himſelf. And yet notwithſtanding, if *Jeroboam* ſet up his *Calves*, if *Nebuchadnezzar* erect his *Image*, and command their Subjects to *adore* them, who almoſt diſputes it?

But, alas! we need not look back ſo far as the times of the *Jewiſh Church* for pregnant Inſtances; our own *Chronicles* will tell us, that whileſt the *Kings* of *England* were *Slaves* to the *Pope*, ſo *dull* and *ſottiſh*, ſo *eaſie* and *pliable* were the *People*, as to be ſo too: and ſince our *Princes* have juſtly ſhook off the *Roman Yoke*, the *Subjects* have generally been, if not ſo *Religious*, yet ſo *Conformable*, as to become *Proteſtants* too.

Tell

Tell me, Sirs, if the *Roman Religion* be *good*, why did the *People* of *England caſt* it *off?* but if the *Roman Religion* be ſtark *naught*, as certainly 'tis, why did the *People* of *England* ever *own* it? Doubtleſs theſe *General* and *ſudden Turns* of *Religion*, theſe *Univerſal* and *Epidemical Changes* of our *Faith* and *Worſhip*, which do not ariſe from any *mature Deliberation* and *new Convictions*, are evident *Demonſtrations*, that men *take up* or *lay down* their *Religion* juſt as they do their *Faſhion*; 'tis *this* or *that* according as the *Court* thinks fit to *alter*: as if, to *believe* as the *King believes*, and to *doe* as the *King doeth*, were a part of that *Allegeance* which we owe him.

But is this indeed to obey the great *Command* in my *Text*, *Prove all things?* 'Tis ſure, the *Kings* of *England* do not pretend, like that *Uſurper* at *Rome*, that they cannot *erre*; nor is it imagined by any, that there is any more *Infallibility* annexed to the *Prince*'s *Throne* then to the *Pope*'s *Chair*. No; we are required, and deeply concerned too, to *examine* the Grounds of that *Religion* which the *King*'s *Laws* do *eſtabliſh*: and if we find, as upon ſtrict *Search* we certainly ſhall, that the *preſent Religion* of our *Church*, *commended* to us by the *King*'s own *Example*, and *confirmed* by his *Laws*, is warranted by the *Word* of *God*, by the *Canons* of *Ancient Councils*, by the *joint Teſtimony* of the *Primitive Fathers*, and many received *Confeſſions* of *Faith*; let us then *bleſs* our *God*, that we have as yet a *Prince* who *ſtyles* himſelf, really *is*, and *declares* his reſolution to *continue*, the *Defender* of that *Faith* which, paſt all *peradventure*, is truly *Ancient* and *Apoſtolicall*.

II. Conſider what abundant cauſe we have to be *jealous* of *that Religion* which will by *no* means *ſubmit*

mit to this great *Command* in the *Text*, which *fears* to be *examined*, and *dares* not *ſtand* the *Teſt*.

Certainly, we have all the reaſon in the world to ſuſpect that *Religion* which doth ſo manifeſtly ſuſpect *it ſelf*. 'Tis a great Argument that a man doth doubt his *Cauſe* and queſtion its *merit*, when he ſheweth himſelf exceeding loath to come to a *Trial*: and 'tis a ſhrewd ſign that *Wares* are corrupt and naught, when they are produced and ſhewed onely in the *dark*. What our Bleſſed *Saviour* (*Joh.* 3.21.) ſaith of *Perſons*, may fitly be ſaid of *Religions* too; *He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifeſt*. The man that is *honeſt*, *vertuous* and *learned*, doth rather *hope* then *fear* to be ſearched into: but he that conſtantly lurks in *corners*, and walks under a *diſguiſe*, doth give the world ſufficient ground to ſuſpect that he is ſome broken *Bankrupt* or *Knave*. 'Tis thus with *Religions* too: That *Religion* which dares appeal to the *Tribunal* of *God* and *man*; that *Religion* which *deſires* to be *examined* by *Scriptures*, *Councils* and *Fathers*; that *Religion* which doth publickly *expoſe* all its *Doctrines*, and doth not onely *allow* all its *friends*, but *provokes* its utmoſt *enemies*, to ſift and *try* them; 'tis eaſie to think that ſuch a *Religion* is *ſound*, right and true: 'tis *full weight*, that *fears* not the *Scales*; and *right metall*, that doth not *dread* the *Touchſtone*.

But now, if there be ſuch a *Religion* found within the *Church* that is *jealous* of *it ſelf*, that *fears* its *own Proſelytes*, that dares not *endure* the *Scrutiny*, no not of its *own friends*; have we not a ſufficient reaſon to *ſuſpect* it? Now, ſhall I tell you? *ſuch* is the *Religion* of the *Roman Church*, which dares not ſuffer its *own* Members ſo much as once to *peep* into the *Bible*,

Bible, leſt perhaps that clear and Sacred *Glaſs* ſhould immediately *repreſent*, even to *vulgar* eyes, thoſe *foul*, and by them as yet *undiſcerned*, *Spots*, which that *corrupt* and *ſcabby Religion* hath upon its *Face*. I remember, *Chemnitius*, who hath ſomewhat narrowly enquired into the *Council* of *Trent*, and *diſcovered* to the world the *nakedneſs* of their *Decrees*, is, for that very Reaſon, ſtyled, not a *Saucy fellow*, but a down-right *Heretick*; and ſo, for making *ſome* conſiderable *Inquiſition* into their *Religion*, was thought to deſerve at leaſt their *Great* one.

As for the *Religion* of the *Reformed Church*, 'tis otherwiſe with us; the *examination* of our Doctrines is not onely *allowed*, but *required* too: we put the *Scales* into your hands, and bid you *weigh* them; we ſet the *Touchſtone* before your eye, and bid you *try* them; we *tranſlate*, we *print*, we put the *Bible* into your boſom, and bid you thence examine what our *Church* doth *hold*, what our *Miniſters* do *preach*, and what you *your ſelves* muſt *believe* and *doe*. I can tell you, this fair dealing is not to be found at *Rome*: no; there the *Holy Bible*, that *dangerous* Book, muſt be withheld. And the truth is, though there be *Sin* and *Sacrilege* in their ſo doing, yet there is a great deal of *Craft* and *Policy* too: for where the *Cauſe* is *naught*, if there be ſome *material Witneſs* whoſe Teſtimony will certainly overthrow it, if he cannot be *bribed*, 'tis great Prudence to *remove* him out of the way. And this courſe takes the *Roman Church*; 'tis that miſerable Shift which a bad Cauſe drives them to; what ever comes of it, the *Scriptures* muſt be withdrawn: for, ſhould they permit their people to peruſe them, they have juſt cauſe to fear that, at *firſt ſight*, they would *diſlike* ſuch and ſuch gainfull

Doctrines; and, upon a ſerious *review*, *abjure* them quite. And upon this ſcore do they find themſelves neceſſitated, as to *withdraw* the *Bible*, ſo likewiſe baſely to *corrupt* the moſt Ancient *Councils* and *Fathers*; acting, methinks, like ſome *knaviſh Merchant*, who ſells *bad Wares*, and that by *falſe Weights* and *Meaſures*, and therefore is concerned to ſee that there be no *Standard* near him.

What is the great *Axiome* of the *Roman Church*, *Eſtius*, a Friend, Champion, and Son of theirs, doth thus inform us, (2. *Theſ*. 5. 21.) *Tenendum quod tenet Eccleſia*; What the *Church believes*, what the *Church requires*, i. e. whatever the *Pope* and his *Council* thinks fit, *that*, and *onely* that, without more adoe, muſt be *believed* and *done*. 'Tis evident that they require little more of their *Proſelytes* then a bare *implicit Faith*, and a *blind Obedience*. And that they ground upon this fond Preſumption and rotten Principle, That their *Councils*, at leaſt if *confirmed* by the *Pope*, cannot *erre*; how *vicious* ſoever the *Pope* may be in his *Converſation*, yet when he ſits *in Cathedra*, in his *Chair*, he muſt be *Infallible* in his *Judgment* ſtill: as if the *Golden Mitre* and *triple Crown*, which *adorn* his *Head*, muſt needs *inſpire* it too.

But if theſe things be ſo indeed, what need they *fear* the ſevereſt *Trial*? If *Councils* cannot *erre*, what need they *fear* the ſtricteſt *Search*? If the *Pope* be really *Infallible*, what need he *dread* the cloſeſt *Scrutiny*? *Search the Scriptures*, ſaith *Chriſt* himſelf to all his Hearers: *Search not the Scriptures*, ſaith his *pretended Vicar*; and yet *Infallible*? *Try the ſpirits*, ſaith the Apoſtle: *Try not the ſpirits*, ſaith the *Roman Biſhop*; and yet *Infallible*? *Prove all things*, ſaith Saint *Paul*: *Prove nothing*, ſaith the *Succeſſour* of Saint *Peter*; and yet *Infallible*?

No;

No; they *manage* a *bad* Cauſe that are afraid to ſee it *opened*. 'Tis not *Religion* and *Conſcience*, but *Craft*, *Guilt* and *Fear*, that make them withdraw the *Bible*, and ſo *decline* a *Trial*: for, had but the poor people that live under the *Tyranny* of *Rome* liberty, means and knowledge, to *examine* thoſe *Doctrines* which now they are conſtrained to *take up* upon *Truſt*; and were but the *Princes* of *Europe*, whom the *Pope* hath ſometimes *uſed*, and ſtill *accounts*, as his *Slaves* and *Vaſſals*, were they but once at leiſure to mind the *things* of *God*, and the *Concerns* of his *Church*; would they but once *impartially* and *throughly* examine matters of *Religion*, and bring them to the *Rule*; we ſhould quickly ſee the *Pope unmasked*, *Kings undeceived*, and the whole *Chriſtian world* become *Proteſtant*.

And as this ſhould be the *ſubject* of our earneſt *Prayers*; ſo muſt the *Duty* required in the *Text* be the *matter* of our *Obedience* too: what the *Proteſtant* aſſerts, what the *Papiſt* pretends, *examine* both. The Grand difference betwixt us and them lieth in *their affirming*, and *our denying*, the *Doctrines* of *Infallibility*, *Tranſubſtantiation*, *Purgatory*, *Indulgencies*, *Invocation* of *Saints*, *Adoration* of *Images*, *works* of *Merit* and *Supererogation*, &c.

Now if any of theſe, or the like Doctrines, ſhall be commended to you by the *plauſible Inſinuations* of ſome ſubtle *Jeſuit*, O remember what my *Text* commands, *Prove all things*: bring them to your *Bibles*; bring them to your *Miniſters*; bring them to the *Reverend* and *Learned Biſhops* of our *Church*, thoſe that are now *alive*, or thoſe that are *gone*, but have left behind them ſuch excellent *Books* which our Adverſaries can never anſwer. And if you find, as upon a

due examination you certainly will, that *your Bibles* do contradict *their Tenents*; if it appear that *our Chriſt* and *his Apoſtles* are againſt *their Pope* and *his Councils*; if *our Divines* have *ſatisfactorily anſwer'd* whatever *theirs* have *ſophiſtically objected*; if *we* can produce ſuch *Teſtimonies* of *Scripture*, as to any *wiſe* and *impartial Judge* ſhall appear ſufficient to *prove our* Doctrines, and *diſprove theirs*; if it ſhall be evident, that the *Reformed Religion* is the *onely Religion* which *Chriſt* brought into the world: let me then allude to the words of *Elijah*, *If God be God, then follow him*; If our *preſent Religion* be *right*, let us then *embrace* and *own* it ſtill. Remember that, for the *defence* of our *eſtabliſhed Religion*, we do, in *ſome* caſes, appeal to the *common Senſe* of all Mankind; in *other* caſes, we appeal to *ſound Reaſon*; and in *all* caſes, we appeal to the *written Word* of *God*. And if ſo, if our *own Senſes*, which we *truſt* without all *jealouſie* in *other Concerns*, do not *deceive* us in *this*, which is the *main*; if all that *Reaſon*, which *God* hath given us to *diſtinguiſh Man* from a *Brute*, hath not *left* us; nay, if the *Word* of *God*, which is *infallible* in it *ſelf*, and as it is *expounded* by the moſt *ancient*, *unprejudiced* and *wiſeſt Councils* and *Fathers*, cannot *fail* us; we may conclude, that *our Religion* is *true*, right and good: and ſince 'tis ſo, let us *unchangeably* reſolve to *profeſs*, *defend* and *maintain* it even for ever. And if perhaps the *defence* thereof ſhall *coſt* us *dear*; yet remember, whatever we expend in *this* matter, 'tis beſtowed upon that *God* who well *deſerves* it: ſhould it coſt us our *Eſtates*, our *Liberties*, our very *Lives*; (which, we truſt, the mercy of our God, and the Conſtancy and Care of our *SOVEREIGN*, will ſtill prevent;) yet remember,

ber, there is no *charge* that can be *too great*, which is beſtowed upon a *Bleſſed Jeſus and an immortal Soul.*

The Second Doctrine.

That after an impartial and ſtrict Enquiry, that Religion, and onely that, which proves to be good, right and true, muſt be ſtoutly aſſerted, conſtantly retained, and held faſt for ever. See why upon 3 Accounts.

1. To let goe a *Religion* that is *good*, is matter of *Sin.* 'Tis the great *Command* of *God* in the Text, κατέχετε, *Hold faſt that which is good.* 'Tis that which Saint *Paul* preſſeth again, (*Heb.* 10. 23.) *Let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith.* 'Tis that which *Chriſt* commands from Heaven, (*Apoc.* 3. 11.) *Hold faſt that which thou haſt.* We have Precept upon Precept: *God* is ſo *jealous* of his *Name*, and ſo much *concerned* for his *Religion*, that he gives us *one* Command after *another*, that he may the more oblige us not to *quit* it.

And certain it is, we may, with as little *Offence* to *Heaven*, with as little *Injury* to our *Neighbour*, and with as little *Prejudice* to *our ſelves*, make bold with many *other Commands*, as with *this.* 'Tis not to be diſputed, but we may with *leſs Guilt* become *falſe* to *Man* then *treacherous* to *God*; 'tis ſafer to prove a *Thief*, then to prove an *Apoſtate*: we may with *greater Innocence* ſquander away any thing that is *our own* or *other mens*, then that *Religion* of *God*, which he hath *committed* to our *Truſt*, and that with this ſevere *Injunction*, even as if it were a *Jewell* of his *Crown*, *Hold it faſt.* But,

2. To let goe a *Religion* that is *good*, is matter of *Shame* and great *Diſhonour.*

And

And here, methinks, if we are not so *good Christians*, as to *value* the *Commands* of *God*; yet we should be so much *men*, as to *respect* our *own Reputation* and Credit: if we will not hold fast our true Religion for *fear* of *Sin*; yet let us do it for *fear* of *Shame*. To renounce that *Faith* that's *right* and sound, is not onely to *disobey* our *God*, but to *reproach* and *vilifie our selves* too. There is no *Pretence* to be named, no *Motive* to be imagined, for our casting off the *true Religion*, but *Dishonour* and *Shame attends* it. See this in 4 Particulars.

1. There are some persons that *forsake* the *true Religion* barely for *want* of *Discretion*, *Judgment*, *Knowledge*, and better *Abilities* to *defend* it.

Certainly, *Imprudence*, *Ignorance* and *Weakness* of understanding is a great *reproach* to any man whatever, but especially to such as want no means to inform themselves much better. So thought Saint *Paul*, (1 *Cor.* 6.5.) *I speak to your shame: Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you?* The expression is tart, and it clearly imports, that there is scarce a greater *reproach* to *Humane nature*, but much more to the *Members* of the *Christian Church*, then the *defect* of *Prudence* and the *want* of *Understanding*. 'Tis the *exercise* of *Reason* that makes us *men*; and the more we fail in *this*, the more do we degenerate into *Brutes*.

And thus stands the case with every man that parts with a *true Religion* barely because he is not *able* to *maintain* it. Whosoever manageth the *better Cause*, and yet is *baffled*, doth plainly discover to his *Adversary*, and may justly assure *himself*, that he *wants* a great deal of his *Reason*, and therefore is so much the *less* a *Man*. True it is, to be overthrown

and

and worſted in the *Patronage* of a *bad* matter is nothing elſe but to be *happily beaten*, with ſafety and great advantage: but, on the other hand, if our *Quarrel* be *good*, and yet we are *foiled*; if we *ſtand* on the *higher Ground*, but cannot *keep* it; 'tis not the *Cauſe*, but its *ſorry Champion*, that muſt be *blamed*.

And that's our caſe this day in the defence of our Religion. We have all Advantages on our ſide; the *beſt* and moſt *Ancient Councils*, the *univerſal Practice* of the *Primitive Church*, the *Teſtimony* of the *Fathers* for *ſix hundred* years together, and, that which is more then all, the *written Word* of *God*, which is the *onely Rule* to ſerve *God* by, are certainly for us. And if ſo, what a *diſhonour* would it be, if any of us, for want of *Skill* to uſe theſe Weapons which *God* hath put into our hand, ſhould ſuffer *His Religion* as well as *ours* to receive a *blow* and be *defeated*? What would become of our *Reputation*, ſhould we ſuffer ſome *crafty Jeſuit*, by meer *Sophiſtry* and *Fallacies*, to *captivate* our *Reaſon*, and to lead us with *pomp* and *triumph*, as ſo many *Priſoners* rather then *Proſelytes*, to *Rome*? What would the world ſay, ſhould we ſuffer the *beſt Religion* that it ever ſaw to be loſt, not by *Force* and *violence*, but mere *Frauds* and *Cheats*? ſhould we ſuffer it to be,, not *extorted* from us for *want* of ſtronger *Arms*; but *ſurprized* and *ſtoln*, for *want* of *clearer eyes* and *better brains*?

It would be indeed a *great Unhappineſs* (but that we need not fear, ſince our *Proteſtant Prince* reſolves to defend it and us) to loſe our Religion by *Force* and *violence*: but to *ſurrender* it *our ſelves*, through the *cunning Pretences* of our *Adverſaries* and our *own* groſs *Miſtakes*, were, methinks, the *fouler Diſgrace*. The *Honour* of *man* doth not lie in his *Strength*, but in

his

his *Prudence:* nor is it our *Diſcredit* to have *feeble Hands*, but *weak* and *impotent Heads*. And certain it is, ſince *God* hath given us an *underſtanding Heart*, and ſince that *Underſtanding* of ours hath no *Employment* ſo *honourable* as the *Defence* of our *Faith*, we cannot poſſibly bring upon our ſelves any greater *Diſparagement* by any means imaginable, then by ſuffering our ſelves to be baſely *baffled*, even to the *loſs* of that *Reaſon* that makes us *men*, and that *Religion* that makes us *Saints*.

2. There are ſome perſons that *forſake* the *true Religion* barely becauſe the *Examples* of other men, who doe ſo to, invite them to it.

That we are indeed obliged to follow the *Examples* of all *good* men, in all *good* things, there's nothing ſurer. *Learn of me*, ſaith our Bleſſed *Saviour*, (*Matth.* 11.29.) and, *Be ye followers of me, as I am of Chriſt*, ſaith the *great Apoſtle*, (1 *Cor.* 11.1.) But, alas! in ſtead of following the *example* of *Chriſt*, who, to the loſs of his bloud, witneſſed a good confeſſion; in ſtead of following the *example* of Saint *Paul*, who proved a *Martyr* for that *Religion* which he owned; we tread in the ſteps of *Julian*, that baſe *Apoſtate:* perhaps we ſee ſuch and ſuch a *neighbour*, one that hath the *name* of a *Scholar*, one that hath the *repute* of a *Religious* and *Charitable* perſon, we ſee even ſuch an one *change* his *Religion*; and, upon that account, we think fit to doe ſo too.

But tell me, Sirs, is it not a *ſhame* for perſons that have their *wits* about them, to make the *examples* of other men their great or onely *Motive* to caſt off their *preſent Religion*, and embrace a *new* one? 'Tis no new thing for ſuch and ſuch Profeſſours, who make great *ſhews* of *Religion*, and paſs in the world for

for *real Saints*, to prove mere *Jugglers*, and, upon every ſmall occaſion, to *renounce* their *Faith*. The *Evangeliſt* tells us, (*John* 6. 66.) *Many of his diſciples went back, and walked no more with him:* ſome little offence they took at his *Doctrine*, and away they marched, and that by *Troups*. Well; what ſaith our Bleſſed *Saviour* concerning this? The next words tell us, *Jeſus ſaid unto the Twelve, Will ye alſo go away?* There is a conſiderable *number* of my *Diſciples* faln off and gone; but what then? ſhall *their example* encourage *you* to be gone too? We reade that Saint *Peter* himſelf, that otherwiſe *brave* and *gallant* Perſon, was ſo far prevailed with as to *deny* his *Lord*; but what of that? is *Peter*'s *example* a ſufficient *warrant* for the *other* Diſciples to *deny* him too?

What it is that moves ſuch and ſuch a perſon to *alter* his *Religion*, we are not ſure; whether he doe it from *falſe* and *rotten Principles*, whether he doe it to *baſe* and *unworthy Ends*, whether he be not *cheated* in his *Judgment*, and merely *trepanned* of his *Faith*, we cannot tell: and yet ſhall *we* be *like* him? Nay more, 'tis poſſible that men may prove ſuch great *Diſſemblers*, as, for ſome by end or other, to enter upon ſome *new Profeſſion*, and yet reſerve their *former Judgment* ſtill; 'tis poſſible for men to *act* as *Proſelytes* to a *new Religion*, and yet inwardly to *approve* their *old* one ſtill: and yet ſhall *we* be *like* them?

No; the *Alteration* of our *Religion* is a thing of *weight* and *moment*; ſuch weight and ſuch moment, that we cannot ſafely doe it without *better grounds* then any *man*'s *Example* can afford us. 'Tis *dangerous* for us to take our *meaſures* from other perſons,

whoſe *weak Abilities* to *defend* their Religion, or *wicked Intentions* in leaving it, we do not know. What though ſuch and ſuch perſons, whether *profane*, or *ignorant*, or *hypocritical*, are become *Papiſts*, and have now left our *Church*? ſhall *we* therefore leave our *Mother's boſome* too? ſhall *we* alſo ſhew our ſelves to be in the number of thoſe *rotten Leaves*, that drop one after another, till the poor *Tree* that *bore* them be left quite *naked*? No; if we are indeed *Chriſt's* real and *faithful Diſciples*, whatever becomes of *others*, whatever *contrary Examples* may lie before and tempt us, yet let us vigorouſly *hold faſt* our moſt *holy Faith*: if we are indeed *Chriſt's Flock*, though perhaps the *Goats* may *rove* and *wander*, yet let *us*, as becomes his *Sheep* indeed, keep cloſe within that excellent *Paſture* where he himſelf hath in mercy placed us. Sure I am, the *Roman Church*, if a *Church* it be, 'tis not like *ours*; and why then ſhould any *fooliſh Examples* induce us to make a *Change*? We would not tread in any man's ſteps that ſhould lead us to thoſe *dangerous Precipices*, where he muſt needs *hazard* his *own neck* and *ours* too.

Well; that's the caſe: the *Roman Religion*, if it be not certainly *damnable*, yet 'tis *very dangerous* ſure; 'tis more dangerous to all *new comers* then to moſt of its *native Profeſſours*. What *hazard* the *Proſelyte* runs, our Bleſſed *Saviour* doth thus inform us, (*Matt.* 23. 15.) *Ye compaſs ſea and land to make one Proſelyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of Hell then your ſelves.* 'Tis certainly thus with every *beſotted Soul*, that forſakes the *Reformed Religion* wherein he was *bred*, and becomes a *Proſelyte* to the *Roman Church*; his *Crime* is *higher*, and his *Danger* is *more*: and if ſo, ſhall *any Example* lead you thither?

ther? Tell me, ſhall we imitate the *poor Sheep*, not in their *Innocence*, but in their *Folly*? ſhall we act like that *ſilly Flock*, which follows the *Bel weather*, even although he lead them into the *briars* that *tear*, or into the *ditch* that *drowns* them? Remember, the *Church* of *England*, that hath *brought* us *forth*, is well able to *nurſe* and *breed* us too; the *Mother* that hath *born* us wants no *breaſts* to *feed* us: and if ſo, why ſhould we ſuffer our ſelves to be ſeduced by any fond Examples, to leave our *own Dam*, and *ſuck* a *ſtranger's dug*; and *ſuch* a dug too, as runs with *Poiſon* in ſtead of *Milk*?

3. There are ſome perſons that *forſake* the *true Religion*, and *take up* a *falſe*, barely becauſe that *Debauchery*, and thoſe *Vices* which they will not leave, do ſo incline them.

'Tis not onely the *weak Head*, but the *wicked Heart*; 'tis not onely the *depraved Judgment*, but the *depraved Converſation* too, that makes a great *Alteration*, and that for the *worſe*, in ſome mens *Religion*. Our *Saviour* indeed hath told us, (*Matt.* 21.31.) *The Publicans and Harlots go into the Kingdom of God.* It ſeems by this expreſſion, that many *wicked perſons* of thoſe times *changed* their *Religion*, and became *Proſelytes* to the *Chriſtian Faith.* But withall, certain it is, that theſe perſons who thus *changed* their *Religion* did *change* their *Converſation* too; as they came off from their *Judaiſm* in *Profeſſion*, ſo they came off from their *Heatheniſm* in *Practice* too: they came over to a *Religion* that was ſo far from *allowing* their *former Crimes*, that it did both *command* and *help* them to *leave* them.

Thus ſtood the caſe in our *Saviour*'s time; but how is it in ours? We hear ſometimes of *perſons*,

and *great ones* too, that are *altering* their *Religion*; but what is their *motive?* Is it becauſe their *preſent Faith* is *unſound* and *naught?* is it becauſe they deſign to *embrace* a *better Religion*, and to *lead* much *better lives?* Alas! there is no ſuch matter: but, their *preſent Religion* is too *nice* and *tender* for them; the *Church* of *England* doth not *allow* men their *wanton Miſtreſſes*, their *painted Jezebels*, their *perfumed Concubines*; we dare not teach that *Fornication* and *Whoredome* are but *trivial* ſins, and may upon *eaſie* terms be *bought* off at pleaſure. No; the *Gallants* of our Age, that reſolve to goe on in ſin, do find the *Reformed Religion* too ſtrict for their *unreformed lives:* and, upon that ſcore, there's no *Church* for them like that of *Rome*. That's a *pleaſing Religion* indeed, that grants a *publick allowance* of *Stews*; that's a *welcome Religion* indeed, that ſets but an *eaſie* rate upon *Iniquity:* and if perhaps the *Prieſt* ſhall be ſo rigid and ſour, as, upon Confeſſion, to impoſe a *Penance*, 'tis commonly ſuch as ſhall not *balance* the *pleaſure* of the *Sin*; or, if it do, there's an *Indulgence* to be had, even ſuch a Pardon, and that upon *eaſie* terms, as ſhall ſecure the Sinner (ſo they tell him) not onely from the *Clamours* of his *foul* and guilty *Conſcience*, not onely from the *preſent Cenſures* of the *Church*, but from the *pains* of *Purgatory*, yea and of *Hell* too.

But tell me, Sirs, ſhall we *change* our *Religion* upon *ſuch* a ſcore as *this?* What *ſhame?* what *diſhonour* would it bring us? Shall the world juſtly ſay, that ſuch and ſuch a perſon hath *left* his *Religion* barely becauſe he would not *leave* his *Sin?* ſuch and ſuch a man is become a *Papiſt*, becauſe he reſolves to live like a *Beaſt?* But, by the way, though men are determined to *indulge* their *corrupted nature*,

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and ſo far to *gratifie* their *Luſts*, as for their ſakes to *alter* their *Profeſſion*; yet, methinks, as they *ſhame themſelves*, ſo they do not much *oblige* their *new Religion*, by making it to be thought their *Bawd*. 'Tis ſure, that *true Religion* doth *aggravate* and greaten *Sin*; but *what Religion* then is that, which doth not onely *extenuate* and *mince*, but even *invite* it too? *True Religion* ſides with *Heaven*; but O *curſed Religion* that takes part with *Hell*, and courts men thither! Well then; let *Rome* applaud her ſelf and *triumph*, as ſhe pleaſe, in the *Acceſs* of ſuch *Proſelytes* as repair to her, expecting from her the *Patronage* of their *Vices*; 'tis the great *honour* of *our Church*, that its *Doctrines* and *Laws* are too *ſtrict* for *ſuch* Offendours. And, doubtleſs, that *ſignal Holineſs* of *our Religion*, which moves ſuch notorious Tranſgreſſours to *renounce* and *leave* it, doth lay the ſtronger obligation upon every man that is *good*, to *embrace*, *defend*, and *hold* it faſt. 'Tis a main proof that our *Religion* is from *God*, that it *abhors every* Vice, crieth down *every* Sin, and exacts from us *pure Hearts* and *holy Lives*. And if upon that very ſcore we do not *like* it, the more is our *ſhame*, becauſe 'tis an infallible ſign that we have not in us the *Fear* of *God*, no nor the *Reaſon* of *Men*. For, doubtleſs, that perſon is ſo far from being a *Chriſtian*, that he is worſe then a *Brute*, who, by caſting off his *Religion* barely becauſe 'tis *ſtrict*, declares to the *world*, and muſt needs aſſure *himſelf*, that he loves ſome *curſed Luſt* better then an *immortal Soul*; that he chuſeth rather to *ſerve* his *Sin* then to *ſerve* his *God*.

4. There are ſome perſons who *quit* a *Religion* that's *good*, and *take up* one that's *naught*, becauſe ſome *ſecular Intereſt* invites them to it. See this in 2 Particulars; 1. The

1. The *hopes* of *Profit*, *Preferments*, *Honours*, ſome *worldly Advantage* or other, doth prevail ſometimes, with ſuch and ſuch perſons, to *alter* their *Religion*, and that for the *worſe* too.

'Tis very poſſible that, at *ſome* times and in *ſome* places, a man's *Religion* may ſtand betwixt *him* and his *gain*, betwixt *him* and ſome conſiderable *Advancement* in the world: In this caſe the man perhaps for a while may be at a ſtand; he diſputes with himſelf, whether 'tis better to *gratifie* his *Conſcience* or his *Intereſt*. But at length the *temptation* prevails: he thinks it better to *ſerve himſelf* then *his Maker*; and to part with his *preſent Religion*, rather then with his *preſent Hopes*. I remember what a Complaint Saint *Paul* makes of this to *Timothy*, (2 *Tim.*4.10.) *Demas hath forſaken me.* But what moved him thus to forſake his *friend* and his *Religion* both at once? The account is this, *having loved this preſent world* The Sinner conſiders, that the main *Rewards* of *Religion*, if there be any ſuch things, do lie *elſewhere*, and are but in *Reverſion*; yea but the *World* hath ſomething for him *in hand*: and this Conſideration *tempts* and *overcomes* O how many Souls!

And with this kind of *Vermin* doth the *Roman Church* bait her *Hooks*, and catch her moſt *conſiderable Fiſh*. 'Tis well known that ſome *learned* men of our Nation have now and then *deſerted* our *Church*, and *run* away to *Rome*: but what ſhould be the matter? what *drives* men *hence*, and what *invites* them *thither*? Alas! the *Church* of *England*, how well ſoever it ſeem provided, yet it hath been ſo *curtailed* and pinched, that it hath not an *Eſtate* left for every *Son*: 'tis otherwiſe at *Rome*; their *Monaſteries* are *flouriſhing*, their *Abbies* are *fat*, their *Biſhopricks* are

are *numerous* and *rich*; and, what is more, what *Hypocrite* would not be encouraged by the *hopes* of a *Cardinal's Cap*, and the *poſſibility* of a *Triple Crown*?

Certain it is, ſo direfull are the effects of *Diſcontent* and *Pride*, and ſo inviting are the *Promiſes* of ſome *ſecular* and *great Advantage*, that men who grow too ſenſible of their own *Parts* and *Merits*, from their *want* of *Preferments* at *home*, and their *hopes* thereof *abroad*, will even *quit* their *Religion*, *forſake* their *Mother*'s boſome, and *accept* the *Embraces* of that *Roman Whore*, becauſe ſhe is better able to *lap* up in *Scarlet*.

But is this indeed a *ſufficient ground* for the *changing* of our *Religion*? doth it indeed make for our *honour*, to prove ſo *having* and ſo *mercenary*, as to caſt off the true *Service* of *God*, and accept the *Devil's Drudgery*, and that barely in *hopes* of ſome *better* and *preſent Vails*? Sure it is, the *nature* and *practice* of *true Religion* is *gentile* and *honourable*; and as ſure it is, the *nature* and *practice* of *Idolatry* and *Superſtition* is *ſordid*, baſe and vile: and if ſo, then, methinks, no *ingenuous Soul*, no man that pretends a *noble Spirit*, ſhould ever *reject* the *one*, or *cloſe* with the *other*, from an *expectation*, though of the *greateſt Advantage* which the *World* can *give*, or *man receive*.

Wherefore, my brethren, if this Temptation ſhould ever chance to be laid in your way, ſhould the World invite you to a *new* and *falſe Religion* by *promiſing* you this or that; yet, I beſeech you, conſult your *Credit*, conſult your *Honour*: remember, 'tis the *Reformed Religion* that you have *eſpouſed* and *owned*; a *Religion* ſo *pure*, ſo *chaſt*, ſo *immaculate* and *undefiled*, that 'tis exceeding *hard* to find the *leaſt*

Pre-

Pretenſe, but *impoſſible* to find any *juſt Cauſe*, to make a *Divorce* betwixt it and you. And if ſo, how *unworthy* an *act* muſt it be to *forſake* and *caſt* her *off*? How *ignoble* were it, ſhould we ſuffer our ſelves, like * *Natalius* of old, to be *corrupted* and *baſely bribed* into *Apoſtaſy*? Were not this to tell mankind, that we prefer *Earth* before *Heaven*, and value *Mammon* more then *God*?

* Euſeb. *Hiſt. l.5.pag.* 196.

2. The *fear* of *Perſecution*, the *dread* of *Suffering* this or that for their *Religion*, is another thing which prevails with many to *quit* a *true*, and *take up* a *falſe*.

I remember Saint *Jude* doth thus command us, (verſe 3.) *Contend earneſtly for the faith. Diſpute* for the *Faith*; but if that will not doe, *die* for it: contend for the Faith with *Arguments*; but if theſe will not ſerve, contend with *blood*; not by *ſhedding other* mens, but by *loſing* your *own*. And thus did the *Martyrs* of old contend for the Faith of *Chriſt*; and thus muſt *we*, if *God* ſo *pleaſe*, and the *Times* ſhould ſo *require*. Should we live to ſee our *Religion* likely to *expire*, it ſhould expire within *our boſomes*; ſhould it come to paſs that our *Religion* muſt *die*, and *breath* its *laſt* in our days, we can doe nothing that is more *noble*, then die *with* it and *for* it.

But, alas! where almoſt ſhall we find a man that hath ſo much *kindneſs* for his *Religion*, as to *ſuffer* for its ſake? *Euſebius* tells us, (*Hiſt. l.6. c.* 10.) that many *Chriſtians*, of whom *Serapion*, though a *good* man, was one, that did ἐν πειρασμῷ πεσεῖν, fall off in times of *Perſecution*. And that every *Hypocrite* would doe ſo too, we cannot doubt, ſince our Bleſſed *Saviour* hath thus foretold us, (*Matt.* 13.21.) *when Perſecution ariſeth, by and by he is offended. Bonds* and *Impriſonment*, *Fire* and *Sword*, *fleſh* and *blood* looks upon as *untoward* things to deal with. And

And yet I muſt tell you, that to *decline Sufferings* and make *choice* of *Sin*, to *ſave* our *Liberties*, *Eſtates* or *Lives*, with the *loſs* of *Religion*, is ſo *diſhonourable*, that it doth no way become us; 'tis an argument of an *ignoble* Soul, one that's far from that *Gallantry* of Saint *Paul*, (*Acts* 21. 13.) *I am ready not onely to be bound, but alſo to die*, &c. A *Gaol*, a *Dungeon*, a *Croſs*, he *dreads* them *not*; they are his *Glory*. See that expreſſion of his, (*Gal.* 6. 17.) *I bear in my body the marks of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*: στίγματα, the *Scars*, the *Cicatrices*, the *marks* of *Chriſt*; βαστάζω, *I bear them*: but how? ἐχ ὡς φορτία, ἀλλ' ὡς τρόπαια, ſaith Saint *Chryſoſtom*; not as *burthens*, but as *Trophees* and *Enſigns* of *Honour*.

And certainly, if it be indeed ſuch an *Honour* to *ſuffer for* a good Religion, what a *ſhamefull act* muſt it be, through *Fear* and *Cowardiſe*, to *diſown* and quit it? Methinks the perſon that doth it muſt needs, in *his own* apprehenſions, ſhould the *world* ſay nothing, eſteem *himſelf unworthy*, *ſordid*, *baſe*. *Euſebius* tells us, (*Hiſt. l.* 5. *c.* 10.) that thoſe *poor-ſpirited Souls*, who for *fear* of *ſuffering denied* their *Faith*, were πάσης ἀχμωσύνης ἀναπλεοι, *dejected*, *caſt down*, *full* of *ſhame*. And well they might indeed; for there is no *Coward* ſo *baſe* as he that *quits* the *field*, and runs away, even then when the *Quarrel* is *God's*. And the truth is, one would think that a *little Courage* might ſerve our turn, and excite us to ſuffer, though ſomewhat conſiderably, for that *Religion* which, if conſtantly *embraced*, owned and practiſed, will infallibly ſecure us from thoſe *ſorer* and moſt dreadfull *Sufferings* which are reſerved for the *fearfull*, the *unbelieving*, the unworthy *Apoſtate*, and that for *ever*.

3. To let goe a *Religion* that's *good*, is matter of *ſtrange Imprudence*, and the moſt *deſperate Folly* that can be.

For, as amongſt that great *variety* of *Gods* which are adored by the ſeveral Nations of the world, there is onely *one* that's *true*: ſo amongſt that great *diverſity* of *Religions* which are embraced and owned, there is onely *one* that's *good*. And if ſo, if there be but *one Faith* that's *ſound*, if there be but *one Worſhip* that's *right*; then whoſoever forſakes this *one* that's *good*, muſt either take up *none*, or *one* that's *bad*.

But, tell me who can, what *folly* greater? To be of *no Religion* is to be worſe then *Brutes*; for even they, in *their kind*, do pay ſome *homage* to their *Maker*: and to exchange a *true Religion* for a *falſe*, is to become more *ſilly* then a *Child*. See how ſmartly Saint *Paul* takes up the *Galatians* upon this very ſcore, (*Gal.*3.1.) *O fooliſh Galatians, who hath bewitched you?* The *Text* imports, that whoſoever parts with a *good Religion*, and takes up a *worſe*, is like a man *bewitched*, ſtrangely *beſotted*, one that hath quite *loſt* his *brains*, and ſheweth himſelf a *meer babe* again.

True it is, an *Infant* may be ſo *fooliſh*, as to exchange *Gold* for *glittering Counters*, and *Pearls* for *pretty Babies*; but will any *man*, that hath his *wits* about him, doe ſo too? Well; *falſe Religion*, even in its *richeſt dreſs*, is no more then a *gaudy Baby*: though it may ſeem ſomewhat *pompous*, and thereby take ſome *vain* and inconſiderate perſons; yet in it ſelf 'tis but a *pitifull* and *worthleſs* thing: what *Varniſh* ſoever is ſet upon it, what fine *Shews* ſoever it makes, yet what it is, Saint *Paul* really tells us,

(1 *Cor.*

(1 *Cor.*3.12.) *wood, hay, ſtubble.* 'Tis *hay*, that's fit for none but *beaſts*; 'tis *wood* and *ſtubble*, that's fit for little but the *fire*. Yea, but what's *Religion* that's *true?* is *that* any thing better? Yea, the ſame *Text* ſtyles that *Gold, Silver, Precious ſtones*. 'Tis a thing of *uſe*, 'tis a thing of *value*: and if ſo, an *exchange* of *ſuch* a *true Religion* for a *falſe* would be, not χρύσεα χαλκείων, an exchange of *Gold*, not for *Braſs*, but meer *Droſs*; an exchange of *Silver*, not for *Lead*, but *Dirt*. Sure we are, whoſoever exchangeth the *onely good* Religion for *any bad* one, doth exchange *God* for an *Idol*, *Heaven* for *Hell*: and what a *wiſe* Bargain were this! 'Tis ſuch a Bargain as no man can make, but he muſt at leaſt adventure the *ſore wrath* and *higheſt diſpleaſure* of *God*.

'Tis a *dreadfull* expreſſion that of the *Apoſtle*, (*Heb.*10.38.) *If any man draw back*: what's that? *ſi fidem abjiciat*, if he *caſt off* the *true Faith*: what then? *my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him*. Such a man, without a ſerious and timely *repentance*, ſhall ſuffer the juſt *Indignation* of *God*, *poſſibly* in *this* world, but *certainly* in the *next*.

'Tis *ſuch* a Conſideration as doth mightily oblige us, in the defence of *our ſelves* as well as *Truth*, to be conſtant to our *Religion*, whatever it coſt us. 'Tis a great deal that we can doe ſometimes to avoid the *wrath* of *man*: we *dare* even *ſin*, we *betray* our *Reaſon*, we *wound* our *Conſcience*; and all this to eſcape the *diſpleaſure* of *man*. But if the *wrath* of *man*, who is but a *Worm*, be dreadfull; the wrath of *him* who is the *ſtrong* and *jealous God* is ſo much more. Man's *ſtrongeſt Arm* is nothing to *God's little Finger*: the *hardeſt blows*, the *heavieſt ſtroaks*, the very *utmoſt* that *man* can inflict, is not to be named with one

angry word, with one *ſour look*, one *frown* from *Heaven*.

Well then, here lieth the *Apoſtate*'s Folly: to *pacifie* or *pleaſe* a *man*, he *provokes* a *God*; to eſcape the *ſting* of a *Waſp*, he throws himſelf into the *Eagle's claws*; to eſcape *Man's wrath*, he *adventures* and *ſtirs up God's*. Or, if perhaps he *change* his *Religion* in *hopes* of ſome *Advantage*, his Folly is the ſame; becauſe ſuch *hopes* of *earthly gain* are like to end in the ſad *deſpair* and *loſs* of *Heaven*.

O let us then remember that concerning expreſſion of our Bleſſed *Saviour*, (*Matt.*10.33.) *Whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father*, &c. That perſon who ſhall unworthily deny his *Saviour*, his *Truths*, his *Religion*, before the *Tribunal* of *Man*, him will *Chriſt* diſown before the *Judgment-ſeat* of *God*; if *we* make that our *Sin*, *Chriſt* hath made that our *danger* too: and if ſo, if our *Religion* be *good*, what deſperate *fools* ſhall we ſhew our ſelves, if we do not *hold* it *faſt*?

Uſes.

I. Conſider how much to *blame* thoſe perſons are who do not *concern* themſelves for that which is *good*, but moſt ſtifly *retain* and reſolutely *hold faſt* that which is ſtark *naught*.

That every *debauched* and *vicious perſon* doth ſo indeed, the caſe is plain: the notorious *Offendour* cannot but know that his preſent *Courſe* of *life* is *wicked*, and yet he will not *mend* it; 'tis impoſſible for the *Sinner* to be ignorant, that his *Adultery*, *Fornication*, *Drunkenneſs*, *Gluttony*, *Swearing*, *Cheating*, and the like, are certainly *evil* things, and yet he will

will not *leave* them. Nor is it thus with *vicious* perſons onely, but ſo ſtands the caſe with thoſe that have taken up ſuch and ſuch *falſe Religions* too. Such is the *perverſeneſs* and *obſtinacy* of men, that, although it be but an eaſie matter by ſtrength of Argument to *confute* ſuch and ſuch a *Papiſt*, yet 'tis a difficult task to *convert* and bring them off: ſo *ſtiffe*, reſolute and ſullen is the poor deluded *Quaker*, that, although we produce the cleareſt *evidences* of *Scripture* and *Reaſon* againſt their *wild* and extravagant *Opinions*, yet where is the man that can *reduce* them?

The truth is, ſo *inclinable* to *evil*, ſo *averſe* from *good*, is the corrupted *nature* of man; ſo great is the *power* of *Education*, ſo *conſiderable* is the *prevalence* of *Prepoſſeſſions* and *Prejudices*, and ſo almoſt *irreſiſtible* is the *Tyranny* of *evil Habits* and Cuſtomes; that when once a man hath *taken up*, and been *wont to*, ſuch and ſuch *Opinions* or *Practices*, how *unhappy* ſoever, 'tis an hard matter to prevail with him, even by the ſtrongeſt Arguments, to *change* his *Religion* or Courſe of *life*, though it certainly be ten thouſand times for the *better*. But what ſhould be the Reaſon? what is it that makes the Sinner ſo *reſolute* and *ſettled* in his evil way, that no Argument can *move* him? Doth man indeed count it a *diſhonour* to exchange *Vice* for *Vertue*, *Falſhood* for *Truth*, that which is *naught* for that which is *good*? is it indeed a *reproach* to our *Judgment*, to acknowledge our *former miſtake* in the *choice* of a *falſe* Religion by our *preſent embraces* of a *true*? Certainly, there is that ſpiritual *Pride* in the heart of man, which doth mightily retard and with-hold him from *recanting* thoſe *Errours* which hitherto he hath vigorouſly *maintained*. Methinks

it

it is with a *ſtiffe Sectary* in a *bad* Cauſe as with a *ſtout Souldier* in a *good:* though he ſee himſelf *overcome* and beaten, yet he will rather *die* then *yield*; rather then *quit* the *ground* whereon he ſtands, his *dead Carkaſſe* ſhall *cover* it: ſo here, there are ſome *Papiſts*, *Hereticks* and *Sectaries* in the world ſo *ſettled* upon their *Lees*, ſo *dogged* and *reſolute* in their *Heterodox* and *falſe Perſwaſions*, that, although we *beat* them out of all their *Holds*, though we *baffle* all their *Arguments*, though we evidently prove the *Soundneſs* of our *Profeſſion* and *Vanity* of *theirs*; yet *nunquam dimoveas*, they are ſo far from *renouncing* their *old Opinions*, that they will rather *die* in them, yea, and hazard their being *damned* too. And if ſo, how well would it be both for *our ſelves* and the *whole Church* of *God*, if every *good* man and *Orthodox Chriſtian* would but hold *Vertue* and *Truth* with that *tenacious*, *fixed* and *unſhaken Reſolution*, wherewith the *Sinner* and the *Sectary* do hold faſt *Vice* and *Errour*?

II. Conſider what abundant cauſe we have not onely to *juſtifie* the *Innocence*, but *magnifie* the *Piety*, and *applaud* the *Prudence*, of thoſe worthy Perſons who were the *Reformers* of our *Religion*.

What *various Cenſures* the *Reformation* of our *Church* lies under, 'tis perhaps no news to tell you: it lieth under the *Contradiction* of *ſinners*, being blamed, upon different accounts, both by the *Papiſt* and *Sectary* too. The *Papiſt* blames our *Church*, as if we had laid aſide *too much*; the *Sectary* blames our *Church*, as if we had laid aſide *too little*: the *one* finds fault, that we have thrown away *ſome* things of theirs; and the *other* finds fault, that we have not thrown away *all*.

But

But ſuch was the *Wiſedom* of our *firſt Reformers*, and ſo great is the *Prudence* and *Piety* of our *preſent Church*, that they have juſtly thought themſelves leſs concerned in the *contradictory* and *groundleſs Cavils* of men, then in the *holy* and *juſt Commands* of *God*. 'Tis well known, that thoſe *Learned* and *Pious* Perſons who were firſt employed about this *honourable* Work were not men of *Luther*'s hot and *fiery ſpirit*, they did not doe it with *Precipitance*, Raſhneſs and Haſte, but with *mature Advice*, Deliberation and Counſell. 'Tis ſure enough, that they well *knew* and duly *conſidered* what my *Text* requires. *Prove all things*; they did ſo: again, *hold faſt that which is good*; they did ſo too. For the *Roman Faith*, which was then the *eſtabliſhed Religion* of the *Nation*, being ſtrictly *examined* in all its *Points*, and all its *Doctrines* and *Practices* being exactly *meaſured* by the *Rule*, whatever was found to be *crooked*, *erroneous*, *heterodox*, they *caſt away*; but as for that which proved *good*, *neceſſary* or *laudable*, they ſtill *retained* it.

And, methinks, this Conſideration alone ſhould be enough to take off that *ſlender* Objection which ſome *inconſiderate perſons* are wont to make againſt our *excellent Liturgy*, as if it were the *worſe*, becauſe *derived*, as they ſay, from the *Roman Miſſal*. For what if the *Reformers* of our *Religion* took that very *Book*, which was then the *Rule* of *Divine Service* throughout the Kingdom, and after a ſerious Enquiry into all its *Parts* and *Offices*, *razed* and blotted out whatever deſerved the *Spunge*? ſhall we blame them, if, after they had thus *proved all things*, which is the *firſt Command* in the *Text*, they did alſo, in *obedience* to the *ſecond*, *hold faſt that which is good*?

When *Solomon* was to build the *Temple*, I do not find

find that he liked his *Materials* one jot the worſe becauſe they were fetcht from *Hiram*, who was a *mere Pagan* and an *Idolatrous* King: no; the *Cedars* being *good*, though preſented by a *wicked hand*, yet *Solomon* liked them, and ſo did *God* Almighty too. The caſe is much like ours: When thoſe eminent Perſons of our Nation, under the happy Reigns of *Edward* the *Sixth* and *Queen Elizabeth*, had leave and opportunity to *rebuild God's Houſe*, and *repair* the wofull *Ruines* of his *Religion*, their great care was to furniſh themſelves with *good* Materials, not much regarding *whence* they had them. Their buſineſs was, not to *erect* a *new Church*, but *mend* an *old* one; and in ſo doing, they did no more then what is uſually done by thoſe perſons who are not ſo much to *build*, as to *repair*.

Put the caſe that a man take a ruinous houſe in pieces, with a deſign to contrive and raiſe it better; ſhall we condemn this man for a fool, if, throwing away whatever *Stones* and *Timber* prove to be *naught* and *rotten*, he do *uſe* ſuch *old* Materials as do appear *firm* and *ſound* even as new ones? Thus ſtood the caſe with the *Reformers* of our *Church*. They were encouraged to *new* mould that *old* Religion which had been *corrupted*: well; they took it in pieces, they conſidered all its Parts; whatever was *naught* and *vicious* they laid aſide, but whatever was *good* they ſtill retained: and who can juſtly blame them? Pray tell me, if *Gold* be *right*, if it be cleanſed and ſcoured, what is it the worſe for being found upon a *Dunghil*? And if the *Liturgy* of our *Church* be ſuch *Gold* indeed, if it be ſo well *purified* and ſo throughly *reformed*, that it exceeds all *Liturgies* beſides, what is it the worſe, if perhaps

ſome

ſome *parcels* of it were borrowed from the ſame *Rome* from which, peradventure, (after the Invaſion of the *Pagan Saxons*) we recovered by the hand of *Auſtin* the Monk our very *Bibles* too? What our Concern is, my *Text* informs us, *Prove all things*; ſearch, try, examine that *Service* of our *Church* which our *Reformers* have recommended to us: and when once that's done, if we find it *innocent*, *good* and *holy*, here's our duty, *Hold it faſt.*

III. Conſider how much to *blame* thoſe perſons are, who out of *Ignorance* or *Debauchery*, from *Hopes* or *Fears*, or the *prevalence* of ſuch and ſuch *Examples*, have deſerted the *Reformed Religion*, and embraced the *Roman Religion*, ſhall I ſay, or *Superſtition?* Such perſons, inſtead of *obeying* the great *Command* of my *Text*, have moſt ſhamefully *broke* it; inſtead of *holding faſt* that which is *good*, they have very unworthily *let* it *goe.*

That the *Reformed Religion* is certainly *good*, that the *Roman Religion*, where it differs from *ours*, is certainly *naught*, many *pious* and *learned Divines*, of *our own* and *other* Churches, have proved by ſuch Arguments as the *Pope* and all his *Councils* can never anſwer *without Sophiſtry*, and *with Satisfaction.* They have proved the *Reformed Religion* to be that very *Religion* which *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles* taught the world; that *Religion* which the moſt *Ancient* and *wiſeſt Councils* ratified; that *Religion* which the moſt *early* and *judicious Fathers* have confirmed; that *Religion* which *Pagan Tyrants* perſecuted; that *Religion* which enabled the *Martyrs* with Comfort and Joy to *kiſs* the *Stake* and *embrace* the *Flame*; that *Religion* which teacheth man to *ſerve* his *God*, *obey* his *Prince*, and *love* his *Neighbour.*

And if ſo, if the *Reformed Religion* be indeed the *Religion* of *God*, whereas that of *Rome*, in many things, is but the mere *Invention* of *man*; if the *Reformed Religion* teach us the *Worſhip* of *God alone*, whereas that of *Rome* requires the *Adoration* of *Creatures* too; if the *Reformed Religion* teach us to *obey* and *honour* even *wicked* Rulers, whereas that of *Rome* teacheth the *depoſing* and *aſſaſſination* of *all* Princes, how *good* ſoever, that do not pleaſe them; if the *Reformed Religion* doth proteſt againſt the *Breach* of ſacred *Oaths* and other *Sins*, whereas that of *Rome diſpenſeth* with them; in a word, if the *Reformed Religion* be certainly *good*, and that of *Rome* ſtark *naught*: I beſeech you by all that tender reſpect which you have for your *Comfort* in *this* world, or your *Intereſt* in the *next*, by all that regard which you have for *Chriſt* and his *Church*, for the *honour* of *God* or the *Soul* of *man*, *Be ſtedfaſt*, *be unmovable*, be not *trepanned* out of your *Religion*; be not *ſurprized* nor *cheated*, nor yet be *ſcared* and *frighted* out of your moſt *holy Faith*. O remember what my *Text* commands, *Hold faſt that which is good*. Why, Sirs, my ſoul for yours, your *preſent Religion* is ſuch; 'tis *good*, 'tis *holy*; 'tis a *Religion* that *advanceth Vertue*, and *beats down Vice*; 'tis a *Religion* that *exalteth Chriſt*, and layeth the *Creature low*; 'tis a *Religion* that *pleaſeth God*, and *ſaves man*: and if ſo, will you caſt *it* off, and change it for a *worſe*? Shall we be ſo much like *Æſop*'s *Dog*, as to exchange *Subſtances* for mere *Shadows*? Shall we be ſuch *Naturals* and perfect *Fools*, as to exchange *Pearls* of *value* for ſplendid and *gawdy Trifles*?

Its true indeed, the *Religion* of *Rome* doth tranſcend and out-ſhine ours in *external Pomp* and bravery;

very; but what then? 'tis not this which *takes* with *God*, and why ſhould it *take* with *man?* There is many a diſſembling *Hypocrite* that makes a more glorious *ſhew* then the real *Saint*; the *dirty Comets* do *outblaze* the real *Star:* and yet ſhall we like them better? no; 'tis not for *men*, but *children*, to be taken with *Babies* and *Puppets*. Secure your ſelves, that the *Religion* of *Rome*, though it be *magnificent* and *pompous*, yet 'tis *naught*; though it *ſeem* never ſo *fair* and *fine*, yet 'tis *rotten:* be confident that if you *change*, you change for the *worſe*; you cannot change, but you muſt *diſhonour God*, and *undoe* your *ſelves*. I tell you again, 'tis worſe, far worſe, to be *made* and *turned* a *Papiſt*, then to be *bred* one. The man that is ſo *bred* from his Infancy, though *his* caſe be dangerous enough, yet here is ſomething that *extenuateth* his *Sin*, he neither *doth*, nor, perhaps, for want of all better means, *can know* any thing that's *better*; and, upon that ſcore, as he may juſtly *plead*, ſo, peradventure, God may mercifully *ſpare*, his *Ignorance*.

But however it fares with *him*, it will be worſe with that perſon who, being *bred* in the *Reformed Church*, where no *means* are wanting for his *Confirmation* in the *Proteſtant Faith*, which he there embraced, doth notwithſtanding, upon this or that *Pretence*, caſt it off, turn *Romaniſt*, and thereby doth at once become an *Idolater* and an *Apoſtate* too. How *God* may deal with thoſe who are *born* and *bred* in the *Roman Church*, that are *devout* in their *way*, and *think* themſelves *right*, I cannot tell: but as for the *Proteſtant*, who *might know*, and yet is *ignorant*, if he be *betrayed* by that ſupine and *inexcuſable Ignorance* of his, or *tempted* ſome other way to the

Change

Change of his *Religion*, his *Sin* is greater, his *Shame* is greater, and his *Danger* is greater too; and *so* great, that 'tis more then probable, that whosoever doth thus remove from the *True Church* of *England* to that *Corrupted* one of *Rome*, without a timely *Repentance*, and a serious *Recantation*, his next remove will be from *Earth* to *Hell*.

Δόξα Θεῷ.

FINIS.